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Volunteer Women: Militarized Femininity in the 1916 Easter Rising

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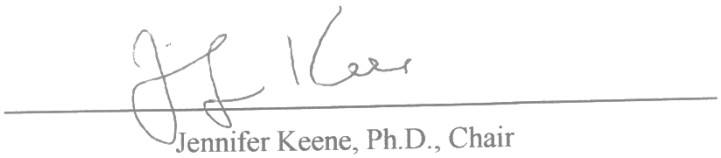

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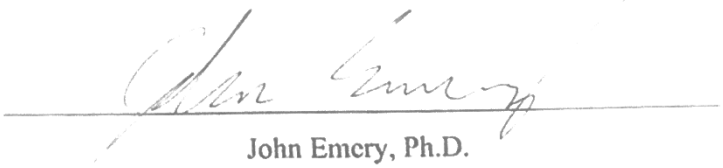

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer Women: Militarized Femininity in the 1916 Easter Rising

by Sasha Conaway

Women were an integral part to the Easter Rising, yet until recently, their contributions have been forgotten. Those who have been remembered are often women who bucked conservative Irish society's notions of femininity and chose to actively participate in combat, which has led to a skewed narrative that favors their contributions over the contributions of other women. Historians and scholars favor these narratives because they are empowering and act as clear foils to the heroic narratives of the male leaders in the Easter Rising. In reality, however, most of the women who joined Cumann na mBan or worked for the leaders of the Easter Rising chose to do so knowing they would take on a supportive role. They did so willingly, and even put the cause of Irish independence above the need for women's rights. Their duties reflected this reality. Once the Easter Rising was underway, women were needed to support the rebels and did so often under fire from British and Irish fighters. For their participation in the rebellion, some women were arrested, while as a whole, the contributions of these women were derided and downplayed by the larger public. Those women not imprisoned would go on to establish the martyr-myth of the heroic and male Irish revolutionaries executed for their part in the Easter Rising. This led to the women's histories being forgotten or ignored in favor of the heroic narrative. Even when pensions were made available to compensate participants of the Easter Rising, women only applied out of need and for fear of poverty, rather than to receive recognition. To this day, Ireland and Irish history scholars have ignored the participation of gender-conforming women in favor of the more heroic narrative of

women whose experiences more closely resemble those of the Easter Rising's male martyrs.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ICA	Irish Citizen Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood
GPO	General Post Office

Introduction

"We worked together as one, each one doing all possible to help the organisation and to forward the cause, whilst never counting the cost." So writes Madge Daly in her witness statement to the Bureau of Military History. She, along with countless other women, worked as part of the effort for an independent Ireland, free of British imperialism.

The Irish people had a long history of struggle with the British Empire.[1] Most historians attribute the root of the conflict to the Reformation and Counter-Reformation periods of the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries.[2] As in all of Europe, the Reformation split Protestants and Catholics apart in Ireland, where Protestantism had never quite taken root as successfully as Catholicism had. Following the Reformation came further British efforts to consolidate their power over the island, which culminated in plantation rule and led to further repression of the Irish, increasingly stoking animosity between the Irish people and their British Rulers.[3] What truly set the stage for the Easter Rising, however, was the 1798 rebellion and the Act of Union that followed.

The rebellion of 1798 was actually a series of uprisings, in response to growing uneasiness about British control over Irish affairs, including the right to practice Catholicism. Attempts to garner change peacefully so far had failed, and thus there seemed no other option but rebellion, popularized by the Americans and the French revolutions.[4] All of them were put down brutally. In the aftermath, the Act of Union

[1] There is some debate regarding when the British officially occupied Ireland, with earliest estimates being around the 12th century, and the latest being the 15th-17th centuries.
[2] Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.
[3] McGarry, *The Rising*, 11.
[4] McGarry, *The Rising*, 12.

sought to secure the British government's power over Irish affairs by creating a new state: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.[5] While the British hoped the Act of Union would consolidate their power and settle the Catholic question, it would later go on to serve as an example of British mis-rule instead.[6] The 1798 rebellion would live on, metaphorically, in those who took part in the Easter Rising.

Among scholars and historians of the Rising, as it is also called, the debate over which of the men actually planned the rebellion, or who contributed more to the effort, frame a large part of the narrative. So, too, does the need to know how and why the Rising failed, when by all means it should have succeeded. The interest is in knowing who gets the credit for the pivotal moment and who should be blamed for its failure. These arguments also play into how and whom should be remembered for their part in the Rising. Most of the work done on these topics is filtered through a male-centric lens, as it solely focuses on the male participants of the Rising. If women are mentioned, it is often in passing. Michael Foy and Brian Barton's *The Easter Rising*, Alan Ward's *The Easter Rising: Revolution and Irish Nationalism*, and Fearghal McGarry's *The Rising* are some of the key works that look at the strategic and political decisions behind the rebellion, largely through the lens of those men who made the decisions.

Foy and Barton's work attempts to puzzle out the reasons for the Rising's failure. It explores the complex inter- and intra- organization politics that led up to the rebellion through the use of witness statements and government records made available by the Bureau of Military History, as well as letters, diaries, and eyewitness accounts of those

[5] McGarry, *The Rising*, 13.
[6] Catholics, up to this point, had been persecuted for practicing their religion, leading to tensions between the Catholic majority and Protestant minority, as well as tensions with the British government itself.

involved. They aim to provide "a vivid depiction of the personalities and actions not just of the leaders on both sides but the rank and file and civilians as well."[7] The end result is a book that humanizes the leaders of the rebellion, giving them a depth of character rather than a dry, historical account of their actions.

Meanwhile, Alan Ward uses the Easter Rising as a lens through which to explore Anglo-Irish relations from the twelfth century onward.[8] His focus is primarily on why it happened and what effects it had on Anglo-Irish relations following the Rising. Thus, the book is more of a survey of Irish history in relation to the Rising, much broader than Foy and Barton's work.

Fearghal McGarry takes the middle ground between the two. Neither a close narrative of the Rising nor a historical overview of Irish history, *The Rising* uses much the same primary source documents that Foy and Barton used in *The Easter Rising*, with a key difference. While McGarry strives to, "[tell] the story of the Rising from within and below… from the perspective of those who lived through it," he also uses these sources to answer a range of questions that have plagued historians of the subject.[9] Among these include the motivation for joining nationalist movements and what those who fought hoped to gain from their rebellion.

Notably, however, the narratives of the women involved in the Rising are largely absent in the historiography of the Rising. McGarry is the only one out of the three who makes more than a passing reference to women involved in the nationalist movements

[7] Michael T. Foy and Brian Barton, *The Easter Rising* (Phoenix Mill, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999), back cover.
[8] Alan Ward, *The Easter Rising: Revolution and Irish Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2003).
[9] McGarry, *The Rising*, 4.

from 1914-16. Even then, his focus stays broad, choosing to encompass a variety of experiences rather than focus on one group. Margaret Ward's *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* is one of a few works that focuses on female participation. She takes a broad view of women's participation throughout Ireland's tumultuous history, with each chapter focusing on a key organization or event that women belonged to and participated in. The Rising takes up a short chapter, wherein she describes women's participation mostly narratively. Her book seeks to understand the tensions between the women of the nationalist movements and those of the feminist movements. By primarily exploring certain organizations, she seeks to provide a more nuanced history of how women's rights could go hand-in-hand with nationalism and the tensions between the two.[10]

Sinéad McCoole's work, *No Ordinary Women*, provides a look into some of the lesser known women of the Irish revolutionary years, but like Ward's book, she covers more than just the Rising.[11] Because of this, her book is broad, covering a generic history rather than giving an in-depth look of one event. It serves more as an overview than study, telling the stories of these women and not the history behind it. Nor does she offer much in the way of analysis.

The only other definitive work on the women of the Rising is Cal McCarthy's *Cumann na mBan and the Irish Revolution*. McCarthy explicitly focuses on Cumann na mBan, an all-women's volunteer force, which primarily supported the all-male Irish Volunteer organization. The purpose of his work is to create a comprehensive history and investigation into the women of the organization through the use of their primary

[10] Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), 3.
[11] Sinéad McCoole, *No Ordinary Women: Irish Female Activists in the Revolutionary Years, 1900-1923* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 16.

accounts and the accounts of others.[12] While he, too, covers events beyond the Rising, his work provides equal parts analysis and history of Cumann na mBan using a feminist and women's studies lens. His primary goal is to provide an accessible history of Cumann na mBan in order to fill in a gap in the historiography for a comprehensive history of the organization.

Of those women who participated in the Easter Rising, many were members of the all-women's volunteer force, Cumann na mBan. A handful served the all-male Irish Citizen Army (ICA), the Volunteers, or another pivotal organization, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). Many of the women remained nameless, save for a small handful whose stories became well-known, such as Countess Constance Markievicz, known for acting and dressing like a man, and Margaret Skinnider, a sniper for the ICA. Their willingness to step outside the defined gender norms of 1900s Ireland garnered them far more attention than the more conservative women of Cumann na mBan. Women in early 1900s Ireland were primarily homemakers and did not regularly take an active part in political issues the way Markievicz and Skinnider did.[13] Rather, they tended to defer to their husbands and certainly did not dress like men. Scholars in particular often focus on those women who broke societal norms by becoming combatants. Lisa Weihman's article, "*Doing My Bit for Ireland*: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising," is an excellent example of this sort of work. With a focus on Margaret Skinnider and other women like her, Weihman takes the stance that women's histories have been erased *because* they transgressed the gender binary, meaning the societal binary distinguishing the masculine from the feminine. For this thesis, the gender binary will specifically refer

[12] Cal McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan and the Irish Revolution* (Cork, Ireland: The Collins Press, 2007), 3.
[13] Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: a century of change* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003), 22.

to the views of Irish society in the early 1900s regarding what constituted appropriate, socially-condoned masculine and feminine behavior. Men were often seen as the breadwinners and the main political actors, while women were relegated to the domain of the home, which framed them as nurturing but passive actors. While the contributions of these gender-transgressing women are important, little focus has been placed on roles and work that fit the traditional societal norms of that era. There is something appealing in pushing back against the largely male-driven histories, and the story of the transgressive woman is the perfect foil to those male narratives.

Often, scholars have disregarded women's work because it does not fit the heroic narrative of sacrifice and brotherhood made popular in Irish memory.[14] In addition, traditionally gendered work– nursing, cooking, and generally serving the men's needs– in support of the rebellion on the surface does not appear to be revolutionary. What scholarship has been written about women of the Rising offers a romanticized version, attempting to frame them within a heroic narrative of their own, and again focusing on those who challenged the gender binary. Take, for example, R.M. Fox's book, *Rebel Irishwomen*. Written in 1935, Fox looks at twelve prominent and politically active Irish women, most of whom took part in the Rising. Each chapter is a vignette of the woman in question, framing them as a heroine in Irish history. Again, there is a focus on the 'extraordinary' woman, not the average Cumann na mBan member. While this is an early look at the stories of these revolutionary women, it is indicative of the romanticization of their contributions that reemerged in later years. Even Weihman's piece strays into this territory, though to her credit, Weihman does not aggrandize them too much. Both Senia

[14] Lisa Weihman, "*Doing My Bit for Ireland*: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising," (*Éire-Ireland* 39, no. 3 & 4, 2004), 228.

Pašeta, in her work on nationalist women in *Irish Nationalist Women*, and Maryann Valiulis, in her work on gender in the Irish Free State in "Power, Gender, and Identity in the Irish Free State," come to similar conclusions.[15]

The issue lies, however, in the fact that women in Ireland took on mostly supportive roles in the fight for Irish freedom. Both McCarthy's and Ward's works acknowledge this, especially in regard to Cumann na mBan. However, both also strive to establish the women as hardworking heroines, forced to work within the confines of traditional femininity. So, too, do other works, such as Myrtle Hill's *Women in Ireland*. She explores the myriad ways women contributed their efforts to causes, from social movements to improve conditions for the poor to World War I war work and the Rising.[16] The common thread throughout is a story of important, but largely supportive, roles made available to women. These works' framing of women's supportive roles, however, takes on a similar tone to Weihman, Pašeta, and Valiulis' work, wherein the women are unwillingly subjugated to working in a supportive capacity, unable to exercise their agency. Hill's work is a bit more balanced in its approach toward women's roles, but it still sets up the understanding that women only performed these roles out of obligation rather than choice.

Contesting this narrative is Ann Matthews' article, "The Women's Section of the Rebel Army, Easter 1916." Matthews argues that women's roles are often romanticized, especially in a combat setting, and especially where it serves to make the women heroines. She also contests that women viewed their other duties– cooking, first aid, and

[15] Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, "Power, Gender, and Identity in the Irish Free State," *Journal of Women's History* 6, no. 4 (Winter/Spring 1995).
[16] Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: a century of change* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 2003), 13.

carrying dispatches– equal to participating in combat.[17] Women gave value to their own work without feeling the need to romanticize it as a struggle against the patriarchy.

Enloe and Militarized Femininity

Militarization does not always show itself by women performing economic, political, or even social roles that break with the traditions of a society. Through the framework of feminist and women's studies, Cynthia Enloe focuses on militarization through creations of patriotic motherhood and the need for other, supplementary roles during a time of conflict. In her book *Maneuvers*, Enloe specifically discusses how women become militarized, often subtly.[18] Mothers are often encouraged to send their sons to war by framing it as a patriotic duty, for example. In fact, "many women have greeted with enthusiasm any politician who has proposed that mothering is a *national* activity," because it acknowledges and makes patriotic their sacrifices and hard work.[19] Furthermore, she argues that the militarization of women is often caused by a military need for assistive roles, such as the manufacturing of arms or the upkeep in troop morale. The Irish Volunteers used this strategy to employ women to work for them as unpaid volunteers, but women also allowed themselves to be militarized in such a way as a form of exhibiting their patriotism.

Enloe's other relevant work, *Globalization & Militarism*, focuses on modern forms of militarization around the globe. The chapter entitled, "Paying Close Attention to Women in Militaries," especially focuses on women soldiers in the modern military. Her

[17] Ann Matthews, "The Women's Section of the Rebel Army, Easter 1916: class background and role," *Socialist History* 49 (2016), 52, 65.
[18] Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 2.
[19] Emphasis in original. Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 11.

argument there is that women are often forced to straddle the gender binary; they are defined by it and resist it simultaneously, caught between fulfilling their culture's definition of accepted femininity and masculinity.[20] So, too, is there a societal tension between the modernity of the new woman soldier and the need to adhere to a society's gender constructions. In this same way, there was a struggle within the women of the Rising, between their work that fell neatly into appropriately feminine roles and that work which did not. Though the work was often disguised in the language of femininity, there were still instances where it strained the established gender hierarchy between the female volunteers and the all-male Irish Volunteer force.

Cynthia Enloe's work explores militarized femininity in depth. Her definition of the term is one that encompasses both books but can primarily be found in *Maneuvers*. She first defines militarization as, "a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas."[21] Thus militarized femininity is the way in which a woman's femininity is used (or controlled) by the military or military organization to benefit them. Often, the work offered to women falls neatly within the acceptable range for gender-appropriate work, such as homemaking. In other cases, such as with factory work, the language of militarized femininity is used to mask any work that strains the relationship between what is accepted as masculine or feminine within a society. For Enloe, militarized femininity is a pervasive force and mostly subconscious. Women do not

[20] Cynthia Enloe, Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 64.
[21] Emphasis in the original. Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 3.

necessarily willingly accept it; they are led into it by higher military powers and policymakers.[22]

In contrast, this paper posits that women were aware of their options and willingly chose to militarize their femininity when offered opportunities to support the Irish Volunteers. They had much more agency than is given them in current scholarly works on the women of the Easter Rising. Most women who joined had no qualms about working in a supportive capacity. The work they performed, such as nursing, cooking, and fundraising, fell neatly into what was considered appropriate work for women in early 1900s Ireland. Those jobs that did not, such as acting as messengers and aiding in the manufacture of weapons and ammunition, were masked under the guise of militarized femininity; that is, these jobs were considered appropriate for women because the Irish Volunteers needed them to be appropriate for women. Jobs like these were framed as extensions of women's patriotic duty and supportive service.

This is often overlooked in research regarding the rebel women. Their jobs are often framed negatively as subordinate to men because of forced societal standards of femininity. This does not reflect the reality of the women who participated in the Rising. The women considered their work to be a patriotic duty that could only be fulfilled through a subordinate role. When given the chance to elevate their contributions to the mythic status of their male compatriots, they chose not to do so, instead elevating their male peers' narratives further.

[22] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 36.

On Memory

Maurice Halbwachs' work *On Collective Memory* serves as a useful guide into how and why certain narratives are created within a culture. Halbwachs argues that collective memory is created or produced rather than arising naturally.[23] It is the collective effort of a group that informs which histories will be remembered and which will be forgotten. In the immediate aftermath of the Rising, and for years to come, the women's contributions were seemingly forgotten, or remembered in a way that simply echoed the male narrative. This interpretation, however, has begun to change.

Sharon Furlong bridges the gap between Halbwach's theory and McCarthy's narrative history of Cumann na mBan. Her article "'Herstory' Recovered: Assessing the contribution of Cumann na mBan, 1914-1923," argues that women deserve equal commemoration alongside the male veterans of the Easter Rising.[24] Because of their subordinate role, Cumann na mBan members were forgotten in favor of the less traditionally feminine women who shunned the gender binary between Irish men and women. Her argument touches on a fundamental aspect of women working for the Rising effort: they often embraced and worked within the gender binary willingly to push for Irish independence.

Also exploring women's roles and their memories in military movements are Deborah Thom's "Women, War Work and the State of Ireland, 1914-1918" and Elaine Sisson's "Sister in Arms." Both articles talk about women's militarization, specifically focusing on women who worked in war factories during World War I. Thom focuses on

[23] "Maurice Halbwachs," *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2011), 141.
[24] Sharon Furlong, "'Herstory' Recovered: Assessing the contribution of Cumann na mBan 1914-1923," *The Past: The Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society* no. 30 (2009), 91.

women in several war industries, rather than just munitions, and how war work did not lead to lasting changes in Irish women's societal norms.[25] Meanwhile, Sisson focuses solely on munition factory workers. Like Thom, she argues that war work did not lead to any lasting changes in women's roles in society; rather, women quietly slipped back into their domestic lives.[26] Though both frame their arguments in a heroic light regarding women's contributions, their insights into women's roles and the memory surrounding these efforts reveal how women's histories came to be forgotten. Thom argues that the focus on those handful of women openly working for the rebel cause, such as Countess Markievicz and Margaret Skinnider, overshadowed the contributions of women who participated in the war effort for World War I, which also relates to the ways in which even women of the Rising were overshadowed by those same outspoken women. Sisson, meanwhile, argues that even those women in the Irish Citizen Army who took part in the Rising were forgotten on the basis of their gender.

Regarding compensating veterans, historian and scholar Marie Coleman has done extensive work on the compensation of the Rising women. Her articles discuss the pension acts and how, if at all, women were compensated for their work during Ireland's revolutionary years. She argues that women's gender negatively affected their chances at receiving pension and that, unlike the men, they applied for pension out of need rather than a sense of pride.[27] She also discusses the difficulties the Irish government had in

[25] Deborah Thom, "Women, War Work and the State of Ireland, 1914-1918," *Women's History Review* 27, no. 3 (2018), 464-465.
[26] Elaine Sisson, "Sisters in Arms: Ireland, Gender, and Militarisation, 1914-1918," *Modernist Cultures* 13, no. 3 (2018), 358-359.
[27] Marie Coleman, "Compensating Irish Female Revolutionaries, 1916-1923," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 6 (2017), 916.

defining active service and issues of accuracy regarding how many men and women participated in the Rising.[28]

This thesis will use Enloe's militarization framework to show that the women embraced and worked within traditional gender roles during their service and did not *actively* strive to work against this system of militarized femininity. Often in hindsight, historians will portray women as actively involved in politics only when it advanced their interests, whether that was suffrage or other women's rights. This narrative is often portrayed as a heroic struggle, one in which women worked with what little agency they had to push against an oppressive force.

Unlike other works on the Easter Rising, this thesis will argue that there is no need for the heroic narrative, especially because the women did not want this narrative for themselves. However, the women's work should still be acknowledged as important to the Volunteers' nationalist cause, even if it fits into the societally-acceptable form of feminine labor because their histories allow nuance into the Irish historical narrative where previously there has been very little nuance. Unlike some historians' arguments, women willingly worked within the militarized framework they were assigned and actively chose to defer their histories to that of the men. Their work should not be ignored in favor of more empowering narratives; not every woman worked for her own benefit. Many were actively devoted to the cause without considering it as a stepping stone to their own rights.

[28] Marie Coleman, "'There are *thousands* who will claim to have been 'out' during Easter Week.': recognising military service in the 1916 Easter Rising," *Irish Studies Review* 26, no. 4 (2018), 488.

On Primary Sources

This research makes use of digitized resources, made available by the Irish Defense Forces military archives, regarding the Easter Rising. These were created for the 100th anniversary of the Rising in 2016 and included newspapers, pension records, and records of medals awarded for military service.

Out of those thousands of records available, this thesis uses forty-five out of approximately 450 women's pension files to create a collective history regarding women's contributions to the Easter Rising. These records were chosen because they contain written or typed statements specifically regarding their service during the conflict. As part of their application for pension, women had to provide a written or oral statement regarding their involvement in rebel nationalist activities as proof of their service. While many did provide a statement, not all the records contain this document detailing their contributions. Others had friends and family provide additional statements vouching for their work before and during the week of the Rising, which provide additional insight into women's contributions.

Ireland's Bureau of Military History also provides first-hand accounts of the Rising, supplementing details found in the pension records. Primarily gathered in the 1940s, the witness statements include records from prominent family members and participants in the Rising. Unlike the pension records, those interviewed were encouraged to elaborate on their activities prior, during, and after the rebellion, and it allowed for them to provide supplementary documentation, such as Cumann na mBan rosters. These accounts are used to provide a fuller account of the work these women performed, especially where the pension statements lack in detail.

In addition to these sources, the newspaper *The Irish Volunteer* provides insight into how women's involvement was portrayed in the media. The *Irish Volunteer* was published from 1914 to 1916, split into two volumes for a total of 114 issues. Issues typically report on the activities of various Volunteer branches throughout Ireland and provide other useful historical information to inspire the Volunteers to oppose the British. Following the founding of Cumann na mBan, a column named after the organization was added to the paper. Like the rest of the paper, it reported on the activities of Cumann na mBan branches and also had calls to service specifically targeted at women. The *Irish Volunteer* continued publishing notices of these events and other Volunteer-related content despite threats of suppression.[29] Though nothing came of these threats, they reflected the precarious position the nationalists found themselves in as World War I continued.

For the discussion on memory, newspaper clippings from various mainstream Irish newspapers are used to explore how women were depicted following the Rising. These include clippings from the *Irish Press* published in the days after the Rising and an issue of *An tÓglách* written a decade later in commemoration of the Rising. The portrayal of these women was not universal, and these articles illustrate the difference in perception between nationalists and the general public.

Though these primary sources are invaluable, they may be prone to factual fallacies. In both cases, the records were made many decades following the Rising, leading to gaps in memory as the women were much older. Exaggeration and embellishment are also a common problem with such sources. The *Irish Volunteer*,

[29] "From the Outpost," *Irish Volunteer* 1, no. 42 (November 21, 1914), 1.

though a newspaper contemporary with the formation of Cumann na mBan and the Rising, also may suffer from some exaggeration as the wish was to present the nationalist forces as strong in the eyes of the Irish public. Combatting this are the articles from other newspapers regarding the Rising, which were often not pro-nationalist and took a far more critical stance on the movement and subsequent conflict.

Women, whether through Cumann an mBan or another nationalist organization, performed the necessary work needed to push the nationalist movement forward. Classes in First Aid, carrying dispatches, and fundraising all kept the women within the sphere of traditional femininity with a nationalist twist. Before the Rising, women established themselves as an auxiliary only. Though they stayed within traditional feminine roles, women were still able to serve as an important workforce during the Rising effort

Chapter 1: Before the Rising

Cumann na mBan Gets Its Start

While women were by no means passive actors in their nationalism, they willingly entered a supportive role in order to further the cause of Irish independence. This put them at odds with the suffrage movement, which saw their role as demeaning, but for these women, the need for independence superseded the need for women's rights. Later, this also pitted them against women who supported the British war effort. In 1914, however, pro-indepedence women were still excluded from other nationalist organizations, and so they chose to serve the Volunteers by starting Cumann na mBan.

The inaugural meeting of Cumann na mBan occurred 2 April 1914, at the Wynn's Hotel Dublin.[1] Agnes O'Farrelly, MA, later to become a professor at National University, presided over the meeting, which was held at 4 p.m. that day. Aine O'Rahilly, sister to the famous nationalist Michael O'Rahilly, noted, "that the women should form an organization to co-operate with the Volunteers."[2] Another woman, Molly Reynolds, was glad to have the organization as, "I often wished there was a similar organization [as na Fianna Eireann] for girls."[3] As they could not be a part of organizations such as the Volunteers or the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), these middle-class women had some difficulty in finding a place to demonstrate their own nationalist aspirations.[4] It was customary, for instance, for women to sit segregated in women-only sections during any meetings of the male-dominated Volunteers, and they were excluded entirely from IRB

[1] McCarthy, *Cumman na mBan*, 15.
[2] Bureau of Military History W.S. no. 333 (Aine O'Rahilly), 1. Bureau of Military History will be abbreviated to BMH.
[3] BMH W.S. no. 195 (Molly Reynolds), 1.
[4] Meanwhile, rural women rarely joined because the workload, which often included running a farm and raising several children, prevented them from attending meetings. So, too, did travel, as prior to some branches forming in rural Ireland, Cumann na mBan was primarily located in the cities.

meetings.[5] Cumann na mBan, however, offered a solution to women who wanted to work within nationalist and political circles without upsetting the gender binary.

The organization's primary objective, as stated in Cumann na mBan's original constitution, was to furnish the Volunteers with guns and ammunition to fight off the British and "advance the cause of Irish Liberty."[6] This set the stage for Cumann na mBan to become an important paramilitary organization, aiding the Volunteer branches that formed and grew at this time. Through its fundraisers, Cumann na mBan was able to donate money for the purchase of arms and ammunition in the years leading up to the Rising, which constituted part of their objective to furnish the Volunteers with weapons.

Right away, the language of the original constitution set the organization up to be an auxiliary to the Volunteers. First and foremost, it would support the men's organization. There was nothing in its constitution about furthering the rights of women, a fact that unsettled many outsiders. As a result, feminists saw Cumann na mBan as a regressive step away from women's rights at a time when they believed women should be leveraging what little power they had to gain rights.[7] These critiques did not stop women from joining Cumann na mBan as, by late 1914, Cumann na mBan had sixty branches throughout Ireland and an established headquarters in Dublin.[8] It began as a small organization, with only 100 women or so in attendance at the inaugural meeting, but had expanded in size later that year.[9]

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[5] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 90.
[6] Cumann na mBan constitution, quoted in McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 17.
[7] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 94-96.
[8] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 29.
[9] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan,* 15.

There are difficulties, however, in determining how many women and branches were active. While Cumann na mBan boasted the number of branches it had, it is possible that it exaggerated its strength in order to project a better image of itself.[10] Many of the people in Dublin and beyond still held out hope for Home Rule, which would have allowed the Irish to govern themselves through an Irish parliament, and thought nationalists were nothing more than over-enthusiastic militants.[11] Support for the organization was low among the public, as it was for the Volunteers as well. Dubliners' attitudes toward Cumann na mBan were vestiges of attitudes toward the suffrage movement and the various nationalist movements prior to Cumann na mBan's founding.[12] Earlier in 1914, the Malicious Injuries (Ireland) Act had been passed in direct retaliation against militant suffragists. It took money from public rates in order to pay for any damage done to private property, damages that were largely caused by suffragists protesting Unionist party policies in both the north and south of Ireland.[13] This act further soured public attitudes toward any militant women's organizations.[14] In fact, support for Cumann na mBan remained low all the way through to the Rising. Despite these difficulties, the branches kept track of their members and membership slowly built up in 1915.[15] It is difficult to know exactly how many women had joined Cumann na mBan by this time, as not all branches kept rosters, and many of those documents were lost or destroyed to protect the organization's members. What can be said is that by the eve of

[10] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 27.
[11] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 53, 57.
[12] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 57.
[13] Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 64.
[14] Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 64.
[15] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 31.

the Rising, Cumann na mBan had expanded some of its branches within Ireland and was a major force working hard to push for Irish independence from the British.[16]

The creation of Cumann na mBan was no accident. Feminist theorist Cynthia Enloe argues that military officials, especially those responsible for planning conflicts or war, must find a way to group women under types of femininity that can serve their military objectives.[17] In times of conflict, there is a need for women as both a form of morale and logistical support. The male leaders of the Volunteers needed the help of women to manage the duties such as cooking and fundraising that would allow the Volunteers to focus on their conflicts with the British. These same male leaders also expressed the need for women on several occasions, another factor that led to the creation of Cumann na mBan.[18] Though the Volunteers had been collecting funds for themselves for a time before Cumann na mBan joined, eventually Cumann na mBan was one of the major contributors to the fund.[19] Widely considered an auxiliary by members and non-members alike, Cumann na mBan held events, such as dances and concerts, to raise money for what collectively came to be known as the 'Defence of Ireland' fund.[20] This fund went toward the purchase of arms and ammunition for the Irish Volunteers and other organizations. Cumann na mBan also aided in the preparations for the Easter Rising, allowing the men to focus on training and arming themselves for the upcoming conflict.

Few women actively pushed to be in the Volunteers, but many showed interest in helping them.[21] In the months before Cumann na mBan's founding, prominent women in

[16] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women,* 31.
[17] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 36.
[18] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan,* 12.
[19] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 42.
[20] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 28.
[21] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 11.

the nationalist movement, such as Jennie Wyse-Power and Kathleen Clarke, had already been discussing whether to form a separate group and in what capacity they would serve. A few of the women worried that by forcing the Volunteers to accept women, they would be hampering Volunteer recruitment, as it would discourage more traditional men from joining.[22] The focus was not on pushing for admission or equality between the genders, but to increase the amount of recruits and further strengthen the nationalist movement in the Volunteers. Notably, these same women also claimed that it was the male members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) who first suggested the formation of a woman's only section of the Volunteers.[23] Though it is impossible to determine who truly was responsible for the formation of Cumann na mBan, it is clear that men had some hand in creating it. This perhaps led to Cumann na mBan being formed as an auxiliary rather than a fully independent organization. The women's attitudes, as well, also factored into their formation.

Cumann na mBan acted as militarizing force in the lives of any woman entering the organization. This militaristic influence began with the founders, who were friends, colleagues, and wives to the more prominent male members of the Volunteers. Kathleen Clarke, for example, was wife to Tom Clarke, a staunch nationalist who later took part in the planning of the Easter Rising. Elizabeth Bloxham, another founding member, had already been active in the Sinn Féin movement, as well as the Irish literary movement.[24] Sinn Féin was both a political party and a nationalist movement that focused on Irish self-governance, though unlike its contemporaries, it focused on both the political and the

[22] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 14.
[23] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 12.
[24] BMH W.S. no. 632 (Elizbeth Bloxham), 5.

economic fronts.[25] The overlap it had with other nationalist movements led many of its members to join the Volunteers and participate in the Rising. Clarke, Bloxham, and the other founders' experience with nationalist movements shaped Cumann na mBan policy, especially how best to utilize women's skills. Cumann na mBan became an auxiliary which answered to the Volunteers.[26]

Much like the women of a home front, their roles were to be a system of support for the male fighting force. The duties of women in Cumann na mBan often coincided with societal norms and expectations for women of that era, too, furthering the respectable image of a genteel woman working for Irish independence.[27] Both the duties of Cumann na mBan and women for the war effort invoked the images of the Irish colleen (the Anglicized version of the Irish word for girl), a woman whose place was in the home, caring for the children while the men went away.[28] This image was used by the British during World War I in recruitment posters around Ireland, but the male leaders of the Volunteers tapped into that image as well.[29] For the women of the war effort, the colleen was a symbol of rural Ireland sending off her men to war. For the nationalist, it was a symbol of heroic Irish manhood that would save Ireland from British rule, and in this formulation the Irish colleen was no longer a submissive girl to the rule of the British, but a representation of an Ireland in need of Irish men to save her.[30] Both women and men, however, saw it as a call to arms to support the war or nationalist efforts.

[25] McGarry, *The Rising*, 27.
[26] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 95.
[27] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 103.
[28] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 22.
[29] Sisson, "Sisters in Arms," 341.
[30] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 90.

The propagandized relationship between the Irish men and women affected the relationship between Cumann na mBan and the Volunteers, evoking the home front sweetheart who supports the man going away to war. The organization provided an outlet for women whose husbands, brothers, or boyfriends were involved in the nationalist movement. In this way, they could support their men while also retaining their femininity. Military commanders, even of a non-traditional army such as the Volunteers, have used military wives as a means of furthering their own goals, whatever they may be.[31] Both the male leadership of the Volunteers and the female leadership of Cumann na mBan were able to mobilize the available workforce found in those women whose relatives or sweethearts were fighting for the nationalist cause. The fact that much of the leadership were, in fact, married to the cause through their husbands also allowed for a stronger call to mobilization. The calls for recruitment, the articles, and the inaugural address for Cumann na mBan emphasized the Irish colleen, as well as her womanly duties to the cause. In the *Irish Volunteer*, an Irish nationalist newspaper, one article entitled "God Save Ireland!" evokes both religion and a woman's duty to implore women to fight for Ireland. "A noble [destiny] truly, for it is to be womanly women– women exercising to the fullest possible extent that almost boundless power for good which God places in the hands of every woman. We are Irish women, therefore we could no more escape that high and exacting destiny than the stars could escape shining," writes the columnist Ruth C. Nichols.[32] A woman was often considered a "transmitter of the faith and moral guide to her children;" it was also one of many ways she could also transmit a

[31] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 157.
[32] Ruth Nichols, "God Save Ireland!" *Irish Volunteer* 1, no. 20 (June 20, 1914), 15.

love for Ireland and its independence.[33] The use of "womanly women" further emphasizes the need for traditionally minded women, those who would gladly do their duty without complaint. Written four months before World War I began, Nichols' article taps into both womanly and patriotic duties of the Irish colleen, whose sacrifice would aid in founding an Irish Ireland.

Nichols then continues with, "The empty whirl of modern life is not for us; something far more noble than the present-day craving for amusement calls us."[34] In this statement, Nichols criticizes the English and Anglo-Irish living in Ireland, who epitomized the modern lifestyle.[35] They were not "womanly women" because they supported the British, wished to gain the right to vote under a British government, and thus must have no love for Ireland.[36] These families often kept in touch with their English relatives, played English games, and adopted lifestyles suiting both their class and origins in England.[37] Furthermore, if it was the woman's duty to transmit not only the good Catholic faith, but a love for Ireland, these Protestant Anglo-Irish women were not to be trusted. Those who were not truly Irish could not participate, and Ireland needed *Irish* women who upheld the nation's traditions in the home.

By pushing back against the modern, "new woman" ideal, the article implied that only traditional Irish values will save Ireland, a direct counter-argument against suffragist rhetoric. The suffragist movement actively pushed for the right to vote granted under a British parliament, rather than an independent Irish one.[38] This goal, for many nationalist

[33] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 22.
[34] Ruth Nichols, "God Save Ireland!" *Irish Volunteer* 1, no. 20 (June 20, 1914), 15.
[35] Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 42-44.
[36] Thom, "Women, War Work and the State of Ireland," 1914-1918," 451.
[37] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 17.
[38] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 58.

women, stood opposite their rhetoric, as they believed the right to vote should not come from Great Britain, seeing it as conceding to Britain's power.[39]

Once World War I began, these opposing views pitted national women against many suffragists. While suffragists were able to put aside their cause to support the war, nationalists were not. Not surprisingly, the nationalists decided it was more acceptable to use the war against the British.[40] The schism between the two camps became important as it affected fundraising efforts for the Volunteers. It would also lead to a split within Cumann na mBan that severely impacted its strength as an organization.

Impact of World War I

John Redmond was a leader of the Volunteers until, in late 1914, he called for the Volunteers to abandon their independence goals in favor of supporting the British war effort in World War I. He urged the nationalists to throw their support behind Home Rule, even promising that Ireland's aid in the war effort would be enough to push the Home Rule bill through Parliament.[41] The bill would allow a measure of independence for Ireland by setting up a separate Irish parliament, though the island would remain part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.[42] Unfortunately, many within the Volunteers did not agree. This led to a split, with the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan both losing a large number of their membership.[43] The men who left joined Redmond's National Volunteers, and both men and women worked to support the war effort

[39] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 58-59.
[40] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 65.
[41] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 101.
[42] Hill, *Women in Ireland,* 53.
[43] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 36-37.

instead.[44] The split also spelled the end for the London branch of Cumann na mBan, at least.[45]

The women who were left in active Cumann na mBan branches rallied to make up for the loss. Throughout the remainder of 1914 and into 1915, lectures were set up to encourage women around the country to establish a Cumann na mBan branch.[46] Collecting outside of churches, or other public events, as they had done previously, became downright hostile.[47] This forced the women of Cumann na mBan to find other means of fundraising, namely through their concerts and fêtes.[48] Most of the women in their witness statements, however, tend to gloss over the sudden change in efforts. In fact, little is mentioned of fundraising following the split. With World War I underway, the Irish people found it distasteful to donate to the Volunteers and hostilities grew between them.[49]

In addition to the troubles with fundraising, the national movements increasingly came under further scrutiny by Irish authorities in 1915.[50] Local authorities, too, harassed local Volunteer branches, and the public sometimes attacked the Volunteers themselves.[51] It was around this time that women became employed more often as couriers.[52] Brighid Martin normally undertook this form of work: "I was used as a go-between by Sean McDermott, who gave me messages to carry over to [my brother]."[53] Despite this local

[44] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 30.
[45] BMH W.S. no. 399 (Mary Josephine Mulcahy), 3.
[46] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 31.
[47] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 102.
[48] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 102.
[49] McGarry, *The Rising*, 87.
[50] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 72.
[51] McGarry, *The Rising*, 87.
[52] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 31.
[53] BMH W.S. no. 398 (Brighid Martin), 2.

harassment, however, Cumann na mBan continued to operate largely unnoticed, as there are no government sources discussing women's involvement during this time.

Feminist Critiques

Militant women were an anomaly. As noted later by some of the women, their marches garnered them a lot of attention because it was unusual.[54] There were also large disagreements within the feminist movements at the time over whether militancy was appropriate.[55] In the past, the disagreement had been among suffrage movements, with some women believing militancy was the only way to achieve their goals. Now, the same argument resurfaced with the added suspicion feminists had regarding Cumann na mBan's role as an auxiliary rather than an organization on equal footing with the Volunteers.[56] In one such disagreement, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, prominent women's rights activist and founder of the feminist newspaper *The Irish Citizen*, began questioning, during a meeting, if the women's role would be subordinate or not and what rights they would have.[57] She was promptly thrown out. With each discussion and rebuttal to feminist arguments, Cumann na mBan further entrenched itself into the subordinate model. O'Farrelly and others consistently reinforced the notion that Cumann na mBan existed to serve the Volunteers and aid in the nationalist movement. Though feminist criticisms of the organization were valid, they were perhaps misplaced, as Cumann na mBan was not for advancing women's rights through nationalism but providing an outlet for women to participate in nationalism. These criticisms, however, did influence the leadership of Cumann na mBan.

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[54] BMH W.S. no. 293 (Áine Heron), 1.
[55] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 57.
[56] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 60.
[57] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 23-24.

There were some fears that the organization might split prematurely over party politics, especially regarding those suffrage and feminist movements.[58] Quite a few of the founding women had either worked in the suffrage movement or were staunch feminists in their support for women's right to vote, which caused some tensions between the more traditional members of the group.[59] The feminist critiques forced these more radical women to defend their decision to be a part of Cumann na mBan. For the feminists, the "New Woman" of the early 1900s– able to vote and free from societal gender norms–was a figure of hope, rather than a figure of fear and contempt.[60] Perhaps this is why, despite performing a traditionally gendered form of patriotism, some women insisted their contributions be considered equal to those of the male-only groups. They viewed Cumann na mBan as an independent force, not just an auxiliary.[61] It was how they reconciled their work in Cumann na mBan with their feminist thinking. These women were allies, active participants in the preparation of the Easter Rising, not subordinates.

Not everyone agreed, however. Josephine "Min" Ryan, one of the more prominent Cumann na mBan members, noted that, "People like Mrs. Wyse-Power and others used to maintain that we were not an auxiliary to the Volunteers, but an independent body; but the fact of the matter was that our activities consisted of service to the Volunteers."[62] Ryan acknowledges, however, that, "our Constitution [stated] that we were an independent organization working for the freedom of Ireland."[63] Nonetheless, the founders wished to attract women from around the country and pushing the point of

[58] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan,* 20.
[59] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 90, 95.
[60] Enloe, *Globalization & Militarism*, 64-65.
[61] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 29.
[62] BMH W.S. no. 399 (Mary Josephine Mulcahy), 5.
[63] BMH W.S. no. 399 (Mary Josephine Mulcahy), 5.

equality would not necessarily serve that purpose. As Cal McCarthy noted in his book, "The desire to assist in securing Irish self-determination overcame the reservations of feminist members," and so Cumann na mBan was relegated to a subordinate position within the nationalist movement's hierarchy.[64] If anything, the feminist critiques only served to firmly establish that Cumann na mBan was an auxiliary rather than its own independent body as they put in stark relief the differences between Cumann na mBan and other women's organizations. Though they would not advance women's rights, however, their work contributed to the Rising and the furthering of nationalist sentiment throughout Ireland. Women who wished to express their patriotism and show their support for an independent Ireland could join Cumann na mBan and do so, if stereotypically, in traditionally feminine ways.

The Work of Cumann na mBan

At that inaugural meeting, O'Farrelly intoned, "We may be told that is not the business of women to interfere. Is anyone so stupid as not to see that the liberty or the enslavement of the nation affects every home and every individual, man and woman and child in the country."[65] The inclusion of women in this statement is important, as economic situations varied widely in Ireland. In the early 1900s, the typical role of an Irishwoman depended on her class standing, which meant Cumann na mBan had to ensure its message was applied to all women, not just women of a certain economic standing. It was not uncommon for middle-class or 'comfortable' families to have the women of the household working as cooks, maids, or nurses for upper-class families.[66]

[64] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 21.
[65] Cumann na mBan inaugural address, reprinted in *Irish Volunteer* vol. 1, no. 11.
[66] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 17.

They were defined as middle-class because they could live comfortably and did not have to perform hard labor, such as the much poorer classes in the city, which worked in factories, and the poor rural class, which often worked on farms. Many of those in Cumann na mBan came from a middle-class background, which meant they worked but still retained enough free time to participate in the organization's activities. Still, if the organization was to expand, they needed to appeal to those women of the poorer, rural working class.

Female-driven philanthropic work was popular for the middle class, especially with the enactment of the Poor Law of 1896. The law set out to improve conditions for lower-class families in Ireland. Using their nurturing talents to serve society and improve the conditions of others less fortunate than themselves became respectable for women, especially those of the middle class. Men were in charge of the finances and maintenance of living facilities, while the women were in charge of the appointment of female nurses and domestics, matters of hygiene within the home, and helping foster children.[67] Though it could be time-consuming, charity work could be a highly "rewarding occupation" for single women especially, and it still conformed to existing gendered divisions, with women often put in charge of such duties as the appointment of nurses and domestics.[68]

In practice, too, Cumann na mBan was separated from the Volunteers through a division in labor. Much of the work women did within Cumann na mBan followed this gendered philanthropic model made popular for middle-class women prior to its founding.[69] They were not allowed to overlook finances or partake in the actual

[67] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 37.
[68] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 31.
[69] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 37.

managerial work that came with running a charitable organization. In this way, women were able to participate in administrative, albeit unpaid and subordinate, positions. The separation between the male and female gendered spheres of work was still there, but less obvious than that seen in rural households. Cumann na mBan differed only in that the women themselves elected their own board and were largely in charge of organizing their activities.[70] Like charitable organizations, however, the women had no control over how the funds they collected were spent. Instead, the executive of the Volunteers would decide where and when to buy arms and other necessary supplies. Cumann na mBan also had to answer if the Volunteers asked for their help.[71] In effect, while Cumann na mBan and the Volunteers operated separately from each other, Cumann na mBan still answered to the Volunteers.

Women, notes historian Myrtle Hill in her research, often found these types of jobs fulfilling.[72] A similar dynamic emerged within Cumann na mBan. Articles, such as Caitlin de Brun's article in the *Irish Volunteer*, a nationalist newspaper, emphasized how fulfilling it would be to sew flags for the Volunteers.[73] Other articles also mentioned the sense of fulfillment that could only be achieved through support of the nationalist cause. The focus on fulfillment appealed directly to more traditional methods of feminine patriotism.

With charity seen as appropriate for young middle-class women, Cumann na mBan called on women to continue this form of duty, albeit with a more patriotic flair. An article entitled "Women's Work in the Volunteer Movement," published in the *Irish*

[70] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 99.
[71] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* 100.
[72] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 37.
[73] "Women's Work in the Volunteer Movement," *Irish Volunteer* 1, no. 9 (April 4, 1914), 11.

Volunteer, listed some of the duties which women should consider when thinking of how to aid the volunteers. "We can form ambulance corps, learn first aid, make all the flags to be carried by the Volunteers, do all the embroidery that may be required […]," writes the article's female author, Caitlin de Brun.[74] The article is demonstrative of the how gender-specific work became militarized as the founders of Cumann na mBan worked to garner more members. They were, as Enloe has argued, being maneuvered into selected feminine roles to undertake work benefitting the military, or in this case the Volunteers. Unlike Enloe's analysis, however, wherein women are unknowingly maneuvered into such positions by men within the government-military structure, the women of Cumann na mBan willing chose to work with the militarization of their femininity. There was no disguising the subordinate role they were taking, though some of the members had tried, as noted earlier. The organization had to appeal to all women in Ireland, traditional or not.

When not working, middle-class women's homes were their domain. Hill notes, "Marriage was the ultimate goal of most young women."[75] Other than marriage, children were also important, as they secured a wife's place in the home. As mothers, women were expected to teach their children strong Catholic and moral values while caring for them.[76] The Catholic Church of Ireland also emphasized these values, adding that young women should be good housewives first and foremost, even advocating against women getting a university-level education and suffrage.[77] Though the home did not feature as much as other aspects of respectable femininity, it later became an important focal point

[74] "Women's Work in the Volunteer Movement," *Irish Volunteer* 1, no. 9 (April 4, 1914), 11.
[75] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 20.
[76] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 22, 25.
[77] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 27.

in the immediate months leading up to and during the Rising as a place where women finished preparing for the Rising and hid important documents and other supplies.

Cumann na mBan straddled the middle point between radical feminism and traditional viewpoints, at least at the beginning of its formation. By embracing this model, Cumann na mBan was able to militarize a wider group of women. Young women could show their patriotism without sacrificing their femininity or their ability to be wed as, unlike some of the more outspoken female proponents of Irish independence such as Margaret Skinnider and Countess Markievicz, they were not dressing in a masculine fashion or planned to participate in any combat. Many of the skills they had already learned as women of their household or were in the process of learning as a part of their expected womanly duties served them well in the organization. They also mingled with older, more conservative women, which provided both camaraderie and a safe atmosphere for these younger girls.[78] At least one woman, Madge Daly, recalls the camaraderie found in her branch of Cumann na mBan. She recalled fondly that, "The friendships formed with the members of the Committee are most precious to me."[79]

Funding the Volunteers

Fundraising was one of the more important duties carried out by the organization and the women within it. Events, such as dances (ceílis) and concerts, were intended to stoke patriotism in the people as much as they were used to add money to the Defence of Ireland fund.[80] In its earlier days, Cumann na mBan's main focus was garnering the money to pay for acquiring of arms and the subsequent cost of smuggling them into

[78] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 95.
[79] BMH W.S. no. 855 (Madge Daly), 3.
[80] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 17.

Ireland. Collecting funds by going door-to-door was another popular method until it dropped off around 1915.[81] Unfortunately, women had no control over how nor when the money would be utilized.[82] The lack of control was disappointing to many women within the organization, but it did not decrease the number of women joining and working for the force.

In the branches outside of Dublin, Cumann na mBan did much of the same. Elizabeth Corr remembers how the members of the Belfast branch of Cumann na mBan, "studied Gaelic, ran ceilidhe and helped with the 'Defence of Ireland' fund, even collecting outside the churches on Sundays."[83] Madge Daly, member and founder of the Limerick Branch, recalls, "We arranged lectures, Irish dances and concerts, while many of our honored martyrs came there to teach us the way of freedom."[84] She also mentions, "we always charged admission to these functions, and all members… had to pay: in this way we helped the Volunteers Arms' Fund."[85] The structure of event planning varied little, as events were supposed to push for a certain brand of Irish patriotism, one that supported its independence. There were other ways, however, in which women could use their skills for fundraising to directly benefit the Volunteers, rather than simply filling the Defence of Ireland fund. Nora Connolly O'Brien, from the Belfast branch, organized separate squads to provide food and cigarettes to the Kimmage Garrison of the Volunteers: "We had a tobacco squad, a cigarette squad, a butter squad and bacon and general groceries squad. We arranged to collect these, and send hampers back to

[81] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 102.
[82] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 100.
[83] BMH W.S. no. 179 (Elizabeth Corr), 2.
[84] BMH W.S. no. 855 (Madge Daly), 2.
[85] BMH W.S. no. 855 (Madge Daly), 2.

Kimmage."[86] Her focus went further than funding, and it also momentarily disrupted the established roles set between the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan. Her group procured the funding for the supplies only to spend it immediately on those items so as to send them over to the Volunteer garrison. Furthermore, her branch provided for Volunteers that were in Dublin, not Belfast. Most branches provided only to those Volunteer groups they were designated to provide for. If there were any consequences to her actions, however, she does not mention them in her statement. Though, perhaps because she had been asked by the garrison in question to provide these supplies, she was able to get away with this action.

The *Irish Volunteer* published upcoming fundraising events, often under the "Cumann na mBan" section of the paper. Announcements typically stated what branch was hosting the event and where, as well as the entry fee, which was one of the main ways to the organization raised funds. One such announcement read as follows: "The Central Branch, Dublin, intend to hold a concert on a large scale early in December. Like everything else this vigorous branch handles, it will be a success."[87] The announcement goes on to state the event will be "patriotic" and has "secured the best artistes," ensuring the concert will rouse the patriotic sentiment within those who attend, and for those readers of the *Irish Volunteer* to await further detail as to the day and time.[88] There is an element of pride in the tone of the advertisement, though whether that was used to bolster the impression of Cumann na mBan is unclear. Regardless, it does reveal that women put

[86] BMH W.S. no. 286 (Nora Connelly O'Brien), 7-8.
[87] "Cumann na mBan," *Irish Volunteer* 2, no. 51 (November 27, 1915), 3.
[88] "Cumann na mBan," *Irish Volunteer* 2, no. 51 (November 27, 1915), 3.

forth a lot of effort to further the cause of Irish nationalism, yet still had to rely on advertisements in the newspaper to entice the public to attend.

There were many such announcements in the *Irish Volunteer*'s two-year run leading up to the Rising. Most are described as patriotic affairs, meant to inspire all those who attend. Others, while not described as patriotic, are lauded as great events for featuring things such as traditional Irish costume and dance. Much like a parade, these events sought to stoke patriotic fervor and support among the Irish people, especially those who would normally not participate in politically-charged events. As a nationalist paper, however, it tended to cater specifically to nationalists who may or may not be a part of the Volunteers. Thus, it is difficult to determine how effective these announcements were in garnering public interest.

When an event went well, the *Irish Volunteer* wrote about its success, congratulating the women on their work, and further publicizing those upcoming events hosted by different branches around the country; a stark reminder that these women's work was never truly finished. Events were constant, always doing their best to raise more funds to further the cause. Preceding the announcement of the Central Branch's concert, the *Irish Volunteer* writes, "The Limerick Branch held the first dance of the season […] It was an extremely successful event."[89] It even goes on to explicitly state the proceeds – £9 or £10 respectively– would go to the Defence of Ireland Fund and asks the readers to look forward to more events from this branch of Cumann na mBan. Another such announcement, made in February of 1916, read, "We held a very successful concert in September; the proceeds we spent in getting together equipment, having four

[89] Cumann na mBan," *Irish Volunteer* 2, no. 51 (November 27, 1915), 3.

stretchers, First Aid supplies, and various other necessary requirements."[90] Fundraising through events picked up around this time, just as fundraising door-to-door dropped. Few women mention why, their focus on how they continued fundraising right up until the Rising.

Nurse Training

Once Great Britain entered the war, many Irish women responded to patriotic appeals to prove their mettle by becoming nurses, earning them a small form of prestige, and putting women in a place of importance as sources of morale and comfort in the struggle against Germany.[91] In the case of Cumann na mBan, nursing was seen as a vital part in proving their devotion to the nationalist cause. Taught by Dr. Kathleen Lynn of the Irish Citizen Army, or doctors within the area, the grueling courses focused on first aid, stretcher bearing, and signaling, with an exam at the end of the courses to test the women's knowledge.[92] Eilis Ní Riain of the Central Branch, remembers, "An examination for First Aid was held in November," and the resulting certificates were signed by the doctor who had trained them, the secretary of the branch, and the president of the branch.[93] Many other women trained in the same manner, creating a nurse/soldier dynamic between them and the male Volunteers. The supportive role was reinforced, again, especially as Cumann na mBan became more militant. Their roles as nurses also tap into Enloe's theorization, which states that a military needs women to work in traditionally supportive capacities in order to fulfill the background roles that keep the

[90] "Cumann na mBan," *Irish Volunteer* 2, no. 51 (February 26, 1916), 2.
[91] Margaret R. Higonnet & Patrice L.R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 35.
[92] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 103.
[93] BMH W.S. no. 568 (Eilis Ui Chonnaill), 2.

military functioning during wartime. By training women as battlefield nurses, the Volunteers ensured they had a source of medical aid once a rebellion broke out. Women were also ensuring they were prepared to support the men in a coming conflict.

Women also undertook making bandages as part of their training. These were stored in First Aid kits in preparation for any coming conflicts, though the Rising had not yet been planned. Madge Daly and her branch were, "constantly busy in [her] house making First Aid outfits" leading up to the Rising however.[94] The importance was in the practice of making these bandages and first aid kits. Like nursing, the practice of making bandages worked to benefit the Volunteers in the circumstances where a conflict broke out. Bandages they made now acted as supplies the week of Easter Rising. They could engage in this work without drawing undue attention since other women throughout Ireland made bandages to support troops in World War I.

Nursing is perhaps the least talked about prior to the Rising. The women mention it little in regard to their work with Cumann na mBan. It is worth mentioning here, however, because their training informed their roles once the Rising broke out. Training to become a nurse was the middle ground between the very traditional jobs in fundraising and the more militaristic fare found in drilling and arms training that came later. While it was another example of a subordinate relationship to the Volunteer men, it also became one of the more useful actions Cumann na mBan undertook. There also seemed to be little objection from the women in regard to this training. Unlike fundraising, which some regarded as lesser for its more obvious supportive function, nursing had the added appeal

[94] BMH W.S. no. 855 (Madge Daly), 4.

of putting women close to combat, even if the nurses themselves would not participate in the fighting. It guaranteed, at least, that women would be needed in a battlefield setting.

Training for nursing became prioritized as plans for the rebellion accelerated. Many of the branches, oddly enough, took advantage of nursing classes and services offered by the British government after the onset of World War I. In one of her witness statements, Madge Daly writes, "We started First Aid classes under the Department of Education… For each of our members who passed we were given a grant… and in this way earn £48, which, as usual, was transmitted to the Arms' Fund."[95] Eily O' Hanrahan remembers, "The loan of the hall at the back of the Catholic Commercial Club… was given to us on the understanding that we were working for England as Red Cross workers."[96] Once their political motives were discovered, "we were told to clear out."[97]

This paralleled the opposing, but similar path, other women took in Ireland for the war effort. As part of this war effort, these women made bandages and received first aid training.[98] The classes these women took were the ones Cumann na mBan members took advantage of in order to train themselves. Both sets of women embraced acceptable feminine roles for women looking to support their respective causes. In 1915, there was no call for women to take up arms on behalf of their Irish men. Instead, in the same way the British galvanized the upper– and middle–classes to aid their effort, the executive of Cumann na mBan encouraged women to take on nursing.[99]

[95] BMH W.S. no. 855 (Madge Daly), 4.
[96] BMH W.S. no. 270 (Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly), 2.
[97] BMH W.S. no. 270 (Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly), 2.
[98] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 66.
[99] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 103.

Goods and Uniforms

Many of the other duties resembled the typical fare expected of the Irish housewife with a militant flair. Besides the call to do "all the embroidery that may be required," women were expected to make, and wear, clothing made only out of Irish cloth, which would lead to the creation of handmade Cumann na mBan uniforms within its first few months.[100] Even other commodities were militarized this way, as nationalists encouraged their women to buy Irish-only goods and denounce British exporting Irish goods for the war effort.[101] In order to be a good Irishwoman, one had to prove her allegiance through her purchases.

The organization also called for them to sew haversacks (or knapsacks) for the Volunteers and use their skills as housewives to raise funds outside of other funding efforts.[102] Margaret Kennedy, of the Inghinidhe branch of Cumann na mBan remembers that at some point, the branch members were able to use those funds to buy the material needed: "Uniform material was available on purchase, some of us got them made and wore them. We also bought haversacks and First Aid outfits."[103] In the weeks leading up to the Rising, Rose Hackett and her branch were "terribly busy making up knapsacks for the men and also first-aid kits, as [they] had to have so many ready [for the planned military maneuvers]."[104] Even before then, Josephine Ryan remembers how she and her companions "spent their time making up bandages – not for ourselves, but for the Volunteers."[105] The emphasis remained on making supplies for the men, to be used in

[100] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 28.
[101] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women,* 28.
[102] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* 98.
[103] BMH W.S. no. 185 (Margaret Kennedy), 1.
[104] BMH W.S. no. 546 (Rose Hackett), 3.
[105] BMH W.S. no. 399 (Mary Josephine Mulcahy), 5.

some future conflict. As with all other duties, it still fulfilled a subordinate role, but one that increasingly became geared toward being more militant. The militarized aspect was becoming more apparent, both to the women within it and the wider public.

Besides militarizing goods, the organization itself was becoming more militant. O'Doherty recalls that "at the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa [in 1915], the members of Cumann na mBan wore uniforms. Some of them were badly made… we were not a military-looking body. We were very dowdy."[106] The uniforms, however shabby, gave the women the illusion of cohesion, at least, and solidified their organization in the minds of Dublin's people.[107] Despite O'Doherty's claims that they did not look like a military body, the presence of a uniform paralleled the formation of auxiliary uniformed services for the war effort. As auxiliaries, women such as those of the Women's Legion, cooked and cleaned for the men of the British Army.[108] The uniform acted as a signifier of their duty to the forces; Cumann na mBan's uniform signified the same, albeit for the Volunteers. Still, the women were not yet considered dangerous and their presence continued to be disregarded.

Arms and Arms Training

Arms and drill training, too, was another form in which the women of Cumann na mBan contributed their time and effort, though they were not expected to fight. Furthermore, by 1915 the organization had become heavily militarized, with an outline for training women in coming preparation for possible military maneuvers.[109] O'Farrelly, in her inaugural address for Cumann na mBan, had also said, "It is not ours to undertake

[106] BMH W.S. no. 355 (Kitty O'Doherty), 3.
[107] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 106-7.
[108] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 68.
[109] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 103.

physically and directly the defence of the nation except in last extremity and in the direct stress of war."[110] Thus, it may seem contradictory to train women in the use of firearms, but in most cases, the training was more focused on the loading and unloading of rifles, and any practice in firing was done with modified or miniature firearms.[111] Molly Reynolds was told as much, as she said, "we learned to clean, cool, and load rifles and revolvers. The idea in teaching us the latter subjects – as explained by our instructor, Comdt. F. Henderson – was not that we would use arms, but that we could assist the men by being able to carry out these duties."[112] Branches that chose to include this type of training all emphasized that it was a supportive role, not one that expected women to fight. Few women seemed to mind, however, as they learned to the best of their abilities in preparation for the upcoming military maneuvers planned for Easter Week. "We put in a great deal of Red Cross work, training our girls for war – even to take up arms, if necessary – and to do any sort of work in connection with war," Josephine Ryan proudly recalls.[113] With each branch divided into six squads, those designated were to be trained as nurses while others practiced in firing arms.[114] Some branches of Cumann na mBan even developed militarist hierarchies, with titles such as squad commander and section leader.[115] With each passing day, Cumann na mBan slowly adopted a more militarized tone, reflecting the Volunteers' needs for a supportive, but militant organization with the Rising drawing closer.

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[110] Cumann na mBan inaugural address, reprinted in *Irish Volunteer* vol. 1, no. 11.
[111] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 47.
[112] BMH W.S. no. 195 (Molly Reynolds), 2.
[113] BMH W.S. no. 399 (Mary Josephine Mulcahy), 5.
[114] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 103.
[115] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 31.

This training was held regularly, and sometimes advertised in the *Irish Volunteer*, so that women would know when to attend meetings. It served to create group cohesion and instill the willingness to follow orders, which would be useful in combat.[116] With the rebellion nearing, it also got women used to obeying orders in a timely manner.[117] "We… went on route marches regularly on our own initiative in order to train the girls in marching and taking control," Margaret Kennedy, member of the Inghindhe na hÉireann branch of Cumann na mBan, recalls.[118] If women could follow orders and, as Kennedy said, take control, then they might be better suited to serving in any conflicts that could arise, such as the Rising. Furthermore, she adds, they received training in "drill, figure marching, stretcher-drill, signalling and rifle practice with a little rook rifle" in preparation for a possible conflict.[119] As part of the Tralee branch's training, "parades were held regularly twice a week… either for drills or for classes."[120] The focus was on making women useful during a combat setting. The supportive aspect was still prevalent, even in cases where women learned how to shoot. Women also trained in marches, first mentioned in O'Donovan Rossa's funeral, but also in later accounts. Áine Heron, of the Central (Dublin) Branch of Cumann na mBan, remembers that they "aroused quite a lot of interest, as the public had not yet got used to the idea of women marching in step like soldiers."[121] Dubliners whose husbands were fighting in World War I often hurled stones, mud, and insults at the women as they passed.[122] The women were subjected to abuse by the public because they supported what many thought to be the wrong side. Their

[116] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 45.
[117] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 45.
[118] BMH W.S. no. 185 (Margaret Kennedy), 1.
[119] BMH W.S. no. 185 (Margaret Kennedy), 1.
[120] BMH W.S. no. 122 (Elizabeth O'Brien), 2.
[121] BMH W.S. no. 293 (Áine Heron), 1.
[122] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 46.

ideologies clashed with those women who worked on the home front for their husbands away on the continent. That did not deter the women in Cumann na mBan, but it did put into stark contrast the ways in which these women pursued similar goals (supporting a military effort), but were on opposite sides.

The increase in training was advertised, as were the other Cumann na mBan activities, in the *Irish Volunteer*. Advertisements usually read something like this: "Tuesdays we have drill from 8 to 8.45, and First Aid from 8.45 to 9.30 p.m.-in the Willow bank Huts."[123] The paper also published articles and columns regarding the proper way to train in arms. Once such article, entitled "The Use of the Rifle: Hints to Beginners," provided troubleshooting for those who were teaching themselves to fight.[124] Some even practiced their rifle lessons at home, such as Rose Hackett of the Citizen Army: "At home in Park Place we practised with an air rifle and the friends had a great time competing. I'm afraid we left a nice-sized hole in the wall."[125]

Outside of Cumann na mBan, there were a few women who joined the Irish Citizen Army. Originally, the Irish Citizen Army had been founded as a measure of protection for union strikers in 1913, but eventually it took on a more nationalist leaning.[126] It allowed women to train militarily, alongside the men, but this was an exception more than a rule.[127] As an attempt at a formal Irish army, the women drilled, taking part in night route marches with the men of the army.[128] They also trained in first aid and, in the end, did much of the work Cumann na mBan did in preparation for the

[123] "Cumann na mBan," *Irish Volunteer* 2, no. 53 (December 11, 1915), 6.
[124] "The Use of the Rifle: Hints to Beginners," *Irish Volunteer* 1, no. 34 (September 26, 1914), 15.
[125] BMH W.S. no. 546 (Anna Fahy), 1.
[126] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 60.
[127] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 60.
[128] BMH W.S. no. 546 (Rose Hackett), 3.

Rising. Some women who did not like the subservient role of Cumann na mBan chose the Citizen Army as an alternative outlet for their nationalist aspirations. At least one woman, Maeve MacDowell, joined specifically because she did not like how "they were only collecting money and such like activities."[129] She wanted a bit more action and to contribute in ways other than the ones Cumann na mBan offered. Ironically, she was also put in charge of organizing concerts and dances in order to keep the men out of the public houses.[130] Even in trying to escape the supplementary role Cumann na mBan had to the Volunteers and other rebel organizations, she fell into serving the Citizen Army the same way.

Women even aided in the manufacture, storing, and dispatch of arms. Keegan and her sister, Teresa, both worked out of their home, making ammunitions and storing them on their property. In her testimony regarding events leading up to, and during the Rising, Ellen "states that she was [making munitions] all during the week [of the Easter Rising]."[131] They were not the only ones to make arms. The entire basement of Liberty Hall in Dublin was made into a munition factory, with girls making bombs, cartridges, and bullets for the Rising.[132] Rose Hackett was the only woman to mention this work explicitly in her witness testimony. Following a raid on the print shop she worked at, there was a fear of a raid on the hall: "As there was a lot of ammunition and stuff being made at Liberty Hall, it would have been serious, at that stage, if it were to be seized…. From that date until the Rising, there was a continuous guard kept on the premises."[133]

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[129] BMH W.S. no. 258 (Maeve MacDowell), 3.
[130] BMH W.S. no. 258 (Maeve MacDowell), 4.
[131] Military Service Pension Collection MSP34REF22204 (Ellen Keegan), Military Archives, Dublin. Hereafter MSPC.
[132] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 31.
[133] BMH W.S. no. 546 (Rose Hackett), 2.

Within the records, however, the Keegan sisters seem to be the only ones applying for pensions, who admitted they made munitions. Making arms for the insurrection was tantamount to treason and punishable by imprisonment and penal servitude, at best. The Keegan family, therefore, took great risks to support the rebellion.

It was not uncommon, however, for women to use their homes to store ammunition prior to the Rising. Annie Cooney's house was a "centre of activity for F/Coy. of the 4th Battalion during the weeks preceding the Rising."[134] In fact, on one night prior to the Rising, a car pulled up, loaded with ammunition: "It contained square boxes of ammunition… We helped [Christy Byrne] to bring the stuff into the house. It remained there till they were ready to take it away for the Rising."[135] Kitty O'Doherty, quartermaster to the Central Branch, talks at length about her own involvement in both the running and hiding of arms. "I had myself a regular arsenal under the floor of my sitting-room… It was my husband, of course, who was really responsible, but he was always travelling, and I was in charge."[136] Aine O'Rahilly helped her brother, Michael O'Rahilly, "at his office work in connection with the purchase and distribution of guns… Some of the guns were kept in our house."[137] Her house was even raided, though most of the arms were not confiscated. Herein, the home was militarized. Whether the homes served as storage between transporting the guns to their final location or as storage for extra ammunition and weapons, there was a considerable risk in hiding them. Keeping arms resulted in the same punishment as making them, and these women's homes served as some of the more common places to store them. This action was an extension of

[134] BMH W.S. no. 805 (Annie O'Brien), 2.
[135] BMH W.S. no. 805 (Annie O'Brien), 2.
[136] BMH W.S. no. 355 (Kitty O'Doherty), 10.
[137] BMH W.S. no. 333 (Aine O'Rahilly), 2.

Cumann na mBan's supportive role, though perhaps not as obvious a role as their training and fundraising had been. Women willingly placed themselves in danger of arrest in order to hide and protect the arms that would later be used in the Rising. Their role was one of support because they used their domain, the home, as a hiding place, while also using their gender to deflect any suspicion from them. Cumann na mBan filled in the space where men could not, utilizing the domestic sphere as a weapon against British suspicions.

If they weren't storing arms, they were transporting them. Brighid Martin and a few of her fellow members were "roped in" doing tasks for the Volunteers, including carrying guns and dispatches. "I remember that Effie Taaffe and myself on one occasion carried two rifles under our coats from Fleming's to another house," she says in her witness statement.[138] O'Doherty tells a different version of the tale, saying "no one said a word" when she asked for volunteers to help run the guns from one house to another; she made Brighid Martin and Effie Taaffe do the job with her.[139] They ran a considerable risk, as being in possession of firearms was grounds enough to have them arrested and would have led to raids. O'Doherty admits that her two companions were "glum," and that she "was not so full of courage [herself]."[140] It did not help that her house was constantly being watched, the threat of a raid looming over her head.[141] The work was dangerous, and this is perhaps the only instance where women showed some reluctance to take part. After all, they were not meant to be in combat, and gunrunning was more militant than the organization had been so far. Marie Perolz, of the Irish Citizen Army,

[138] BMH W.S. no. 398 (Brighid Martin), 1.
[139] BMH W.S. no. 355 (Kitty O'Doherty), 8.
[140] BMH W.S. no. 355 (Kitty O'Doherty), 11.
[141] BMH W.S. no. 355 (Kitty O'Doherty), 13.

acted as a gun runner, where she "met a soldier from the Castle regularly in public-houses and got pieces of machine gun from him and paid for them."[142] Even O'Rahilly went on gun-running missions with her brother.[143] Helena Molony, also of the Citizen Army, was able to procure guns from London and "brought home a number of guns in a suitcase."[144] Despite some women's reluctance to participate in gunrunning, they still performed the service because it would benefit the cause they were trying to support. As in the case of their homes, women's gender could protect them from being found out.

Not all women initially received a chance to participate in gun running. Ina Connolly and her sister, Nora Connolly O'Brien, were initially left out of the gun running at Howth. "Had I been a boy I would not have been overlooked," Ina noted.[145] Her and her sister were later given a chance to prove themselves by escorting the guns to their new hiding place. They would, in fact, take the brunt of the punishment, as the man with them was instructed to act as if he had no knowledge of the weapons if they were discovered.[146] If caught, Connolly was instructed to claim she had been at a dance and caught a ride with the young gentleman accompanying her.[147] As dancing was a popular pastime, she likely would have gotten away with her actions if they had been stopped. Thankfully, they were not.

All this training would culminate in the Easter Rising. Women had trained as nurses, sometimes using British war resources, and also began stocking up on bandages. They also began their work as couriers, which would later become useful during the

[142] BMH W.S. no. 246 (Marie Perolz), 2.
[143] BMH W.S. no. 333 (Aine O'Rahilly), 3.
[144] BMH W.S. no. 391 (Helena Molony), 28.
[145] BMH W.S. no. 919 (Ina Heron), 90.
[146] BMH W.S. no. 919 (Ina Heron), 90.
[147] BMH W.S. no. 919 (Ina Heron), 90.

Rising to communicate orders between the different garrisons of Volunteers. Women stopped fundraising with the onset of the rebellion, but the money they had obtained had been used in the purchase of rifles now being used. This job made a later appearance after the rebellion. This preparation, however, did not prepare women for the confusion once the Rising started.

Chapter 2: The Easter Rising

The day the Easter Rising began was one of confusion. Rather than the carefully planned attack, which the IRB and Volunteer leadership had planned to take place across the island, the Rising never spread far outside of Dublin, and mobilization was haphazard.[1] Attempts to mobilize the rest of the country failed, as most either thought it was the wrong moment to mobilize or had already gone home following demobilization orders earlier that week. On Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, Volunteer and Irish Citizen Army forces managed to take several main buildings in Dublin, including the General Post Office (GPO), which became their headquarters during the remainder of the Rising, the Four Courts, Boland's Mill and Bakery, and the Marrowbone Lane Distillery. The British Army was slow to respond, but eventually mobilized several thousand troops and an artillery boat to attack the rebels. After five days of fighting, the rebels surrendered and were promptly arrested. The leaders of the Rising, including those who had signed a proclamation calling for a free Irish republic, were executed.

Of the women who participated, a substantial portion self-mobilized. Many of those women who participated were Cumann na mBan members, the majority from the various Dublin branches, while others traveled from as far away as Belfast to participate. There were also a few women from the ICA and others who were not officially affiliated with any group. Their jobs typically fell into three groups: nursing (or First Aid), couriering or carrying dispatches, and cooking. Often, the women were assigned more than one job throughout the week, switching between all three. Regardless of their roles, women acted as the supportive backbone of the Rising, allowing the men to focus on the

[1] McGarry, *The Rising*, 3.

fighting as they took care of everything else. Their roles also reinforced the masculine soldier/home front sweetheart narrative as the women largely kept to supportive roles only.[2]

Mobilization

Though planning for the Rising had officially started sometime in late 1914, most of the Volunteers' members, and by extension Cumann na mBan members, were kept out of any plans regarding the Rising. Both organizations had been training for an event such as the Rising, but there were not established plans for it.[3] Fearghal McGarry, in his book on the conflict, offers up the suggestion that the IRB Military Council in charge of planning thought keeping both organizations in the dark would aid in keeping the plans of the Rising a secret; 15,000 men would be able to mobilize without alerting the British to a planned insurrection.[4] Officially, both the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan had only been told "major maneuvers" were scheduled, which implied everything from a march to a military demonstration.[5] Only the higher authorities in the IRB knew what those major maneuvers meant.[6] Despite their emphasis on secrecy, however, there was some suspicion among the rank and file that a general uprising might take place.[7]

The only other information publicly available to the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan regarding the Easter Week maneuvers was a document– the Castle Document– detailing a raid by Dublin Castle authorities, who were primarily British, on the Volunteers. In the weeks before the Rising, Eoin MacNeill, commander of the

[2] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 111.
[3] McGarry, *The Rising*, 106.
[4] McGarry, *The Rising*, 106.
[5] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 54.
[6] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 54.
[7] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 107.

Volunteers, remained unconvinced that now was the time to act against the British. As a result, those on the Military Council decided to forge the Castle Document so that MacNeill would endorse their plans for the Rising.[8] Few knew it was a fake. Unfortunately for the Military Council, Bulmer Hobson, a leader of the Volunteers and member of the IRB, alerted MacNeill, who then used his power as commander of the Volunteers to rescind the mobilization orders, even publishing it in the newspaper, the *Irish Independent*.[9]

Confusion followed. With this rescindment came the call for demobilization of all Cumann na mBan branches, Volunteers, and the Citizen Army. The other leaders of the Volunteers and Citizen army chose to go against MacNeill, however, and continued with their plans, remobilizing their forces.[10] Cumann na mBan's mobilization orders were reissued on Easter Monday, which led to at least one branch– the Inghinidhe Branch– mobilizing, albeit not fully.[11] A few of the women mention the confusion in their witness statements. Margaret Kennedy, a Cumann na mBan member, remembers:

> Here all was confusion and upset due to Eoin MacNeill's order, but we learned that they were 'standing to' awaiting developments. We were told to go home and await further orders, but to keep ourselves in readiness… On Easter Monday morning I had a mobilisation order.[12]

Molly Reynolds also remembers being told to mobilize Easter Sunday, but "then we got then [sic] paper and saw that the orders were cancelled."[13] Had orders not been rescinded,

[8] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 34-35.
[9] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 35.
[10] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 35.
[11] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 54.
[12] BMH W.S. no. 185 (Margaret Kennedy), 3.
[13] BMH W.S. no. 195 (Molly Reynolds), 3.

more branches may have been able to join the fight. As it was, between ninety and 200 women participated, even if it was unofficially.[14] They took the initiative to mobilize themselves out of a sense of duty and report to the nearest Volunteer battalion. Notably, however, in those few hours prior to the re-mobilization of Volunteer forces, many of the women did not indicate that they planned to mobilize in spite of MacNeill's order. Rather, they waited for the male leaders to re-issue their orders to decide whether they would mobilize or not. For these women, mobilization would only happen if it benefitted the Volunteers.

Following their haphazard mobilization, further confusion followed when some members were turned away upon reporting to the nearest garrison of Volunteers. Because Cumann na mBan was an auxiliary, the women had to report to Volunteer battalion leaders for their orders. Leader of the Third Battalion at Boland's Mill, Eamon de Valera, turned away Cumann na mBan members upon their arrival, blaming their lack of soldierly training. One of his own men also claimed de Valera turned them away to spare them the horrors of warfare.[15] This would prove to be a costly mistake however, as de Valera found he would need the manpower– or womanpower– to keep his men fighting. De Valera realized, too late, that "some of his best men were engaged in cooking rather than fighting."[16] This decision, however, also put into stark relief the relationship between the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan. The choice to use them, then, was left up to these leaders and not the women themselves.[17] De Valera was not alone in initially dismissing the women, however.

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[14] Furlong, "'Herstory' Recovered," 75.
[15] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 56.
[16] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 38.
[17] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 107.

Though there are conflicting reports, it appears Ned Daly, another battalion leader, also dismissed the women. Brid Connolly, of the Central Branch of Dublin, recalls, "[Ned Daly] told me to dismiss the Cumann na mBan […] In the afternoon we went down to [James] Connolly and we explained what had happened and he told us to get the Cumann na mBan together again."[18] Brid Connolly's statement, especially, shows how participation relied on the men's orders. They could be dismissed and remobilized within the span of a day. It also touched upon a larger problem; the fact that some Volunteers did not want women there. She was not the only one to report such a dismissal by Daly. Josephine Ryan also received a note from Daly telling her that Cumann na mBan services were no longer needed, which led to the disbandment of her small section of Cumann na mBan members.[19] No reason was given for his dismissal. It took women reaching rebel headquarters in the General Post Office and alerting the Volunteer leaders of their plight to allow them to work for the Volunteer forces.[20]

Even when women were willing to participate, they had to answer to the male Volunteers, who determined whether they would or not. This put a slight strain on the gendered dynamic between the organization. Women self-mobilized, and even though it was out of a sense of duty to the Volunteers, it also went against some Volunteer leaders' orders. When dismissed, women felt they had no other choice but to follow those orders, despite wanting to help.[21] This trend would continue throughout the Rising as the women were assigned jobs and sent away on Volunteer orders.

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[18] MSPC MSP34REF3977 (Brid Connolly), Military Archives, Dublin.
[19] BMH W.S. no. 399 (Mary Josephine Mulcahy), 12.
[20] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 110.
[21] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,*110.

Nurses in combat

The Volunteers expected injuries to occur during their prolonged occupation of Dublin; thus, they needed nurses to keep their men fighting for as long as possible. Most of the women who worked as nurses were assigned aid stations by Volunteer leaders throughout Dublin, such as Stephen's Green.[22] Those who reported for nursing wore uniforms similar to those worn by the Irish Red Cross (IRC), armband included, though they were not affiliated with the organization.[23] In later witness statements, this would lead to some confusion as the women referred to their work as Red Cross work, despite the lack of affiliation.[24]

There were some added benefits to this uniform, however. British soldiers, trained to recognize IRC uniforms, especially since many actual IRC nurses worked throughout Dublin, allowed women wearing these uniforms to cross barricades and checkpoints without trouble.[25] This allowed ammunition, dispatches, and medical supplies to also cross the front lines to aid the rebels. By using the nursing role traditionally ascribed to their gender, women were able to support the Volunteers in multiple capacities as nurses. The women even utilized the Red Cross flag to afford protection to themselves and the wounded soldiers they transported.[26] In this way, they were able to spare some Volunteer lives. Aoife de Burca, a professional nurse, and one of many who worked under the rebel Red Cross, worked between the General Post Office (GPO) and the Hibernian Bank building. She remembers:

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[22] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 63.
[23] Matthews, "The Women's Section of the Rebel Army," 62.
[24] Matthews, "The Women's Section of the Rebel Army," 62.
[25] Matthews, "The Women's Section of the Rebel Army," 63.
[26] Matthews, "The Women's Section of the Rebel Army," 63.

> It was then arranged that the medical staff should leave the Hibernian Bank, and bring the wounded men over to Headquarters… When our wounded were got through we placed them on stretchers and, forming two deep, the Red Cross Flag being borne in front, we proceeded across the street to Headquarters, where we safely arrived.[27]

This afforded the women some measure of safety, but it was not necessarily foolproof. As nurses, they were still vulnerable targets. It did not help that the fighting was widespread, and so women assigned to nursing duties had to be on the move. Nurses were often sent where they were most needed by their garrison leaders, and as they moved from place to place, there was a risk of getting pinned down by enemy fire .[28] Volunteer Frank Fahy's wife, Anna, worked as nurse during the fighting. She recalls, "On Thursday, I returned to the Four Courts. I was not long there when the Helga [a British ship] started to shell the place. I couldn't get back to Father Mathew Hall, the rifle firing was so great."[29]

Even some Volunteers had their reservations about how the British would react to the rebel Red Cross. Áine Heron recalls Volunteer member Frank Fahy saying, "I greatly fear that the enemy we are fighting will have little respect for the Red Cross when it is ours."[30] It appears his fears were well-founded, as at least one nurse, Rose Hackett, recalls: "Even when we marked out the first-aid post with a red sign, they did not recognise it and kept firing at us."[31] Later, when evacuating, "the pellets were hitting us… When we were getting out, [the lodgekeeper] showed us the wall where we had

[27] BMH W.S. no. 359 (Aoife de Burca), 9.
[28] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 41.
[29] BMH W.S. no. 202 (Anna Fahy), 3.
[30] BMH W.S. no. 293 (Áine Heron), 5.
[31] BMH W.S. no. 546 (Rose Hackett), 6.

been standing. It was tattooed all around."[32] Their gender did little to insulate the women from the dangers of the conflict, yet women continued in their work right up until the surrender.

Part of the nursing job also required women to go out and gather medical supplies as well. In one such case, Stasia Byrne, acting as a nurse, had to "commandeer some medical supplies from the chemists;" iodine and some other medicine.[33] As the British continued their attack on the rebel headquarters in the GPO, fewer women could get through. This meant that fewer supplies made it through, a problem which would later affect the food supplies as well. Thus, commandeering became essential in upkeeping the nurses and their work as more Volunteers grew wounded. Other women reported having to commandeer medical supplies for their stations as well. In one such case, Brigid Foley was sent out to a nearby tailor shop. "We got aprons, sheets and towels, soaps and dishcloths and anything that would be useful to tear up into bandages," she recalls.[34] The women had not been expecting this, but took the job anyway, as they felt it was a part of their nursing duties. In their statements about the event, the women seemed to have no issues with commandeering these supplies as it was to help the Volunteers. It should be noted, however, that they also had no other choice but to continue aiding the Volunteers in whatever capacity, as they had no safe way out of the combat zone.

Women mobilized individually as nurses, too. Ellen Dooley, a member of the Athenry Branch of Cumann na mBan, was not officially mobilized that Easter week. Yet, when she heard about an attack on the barracks nearby, she "took with her a bag of First

[32] BMH W.S. no. 546 (Rose Hackett), 7.
[33] MSPC MSP34REF20128 (Stasia Byrne), Military Archives, Dublin.
[34] BMH W.S. no. 398 (Brighid Martin), 9.

aid equipment which had been kept in the house for a couple of weeks previously."[35] Some of the men she treated were her own brother and cousin.[36] Her case shows how women had been pulled into the conflict; duty to both family and nation persuaded women to mobilize. By involving themselves in the conflict, they could keep track of their male family members or contribute to their continued well-being. Ellen Sarah Bushell, part of Fianna, another nationalist organization, went around in an attempt to distribute first aid supplies. "I brought some first aid dressings in case there were wounds," she says in her sworn statement.[37] Unable to get through to any of the locations where the rebels had stationed themselves, she "went home despondent" after being unable to make it through to the rebels.[38] She saw it as her duty to aid them in whatever capacity. The failure to do so, especially when the Volunteers needed nurses, was devastating.

Called by a sense of duty and patriotism, these women demonstrate the willingness of all women involved to contribute to the cause, something larger than themselves. Their ties to nationalist organizations and training drew them to the fighting, but so did ties through family and friends. Despite the dangerous conditions, they continued, even as the fighting grew worse. At least one woman lost her life in performing her nursing duty, shot while attending to an injured Volunteer.[39] Besides nursing, women found other ways to serve the cause throughout the Rising, which were equally as dangerous.

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[35] MSPC MSP34REF60152 (Ellen Dooley), Military Archives, Dublin.
[36] MSPC MSP34REF60152 (Ellen Dooley) Military Archives, Dublin.
[37] MSPC MSP34REF22326 (Ellen Sarah Bushell), Military Archives, Dublin.
[38] MSPC MSP34REF22326 (Ellen Sarah Bushell), Military Archives, Dublin.
[39] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 73.

Couriers under Fire

Women also performed the secondary duty of carrying messages between buildings and the people in the days prior to the Easter Rising, as well as during the Rising itself. As women, they were less likely to be stopped as they delivered messages, and presumably they could pass off their activities as running errands or visiting other women's houses.[40] Once the fighting grew more fierce, their gender also allowed them to make it past barricades and to the rebels. Maire Carron was one of those women. In her written statement, she relates, "Sent over City with messages. Brought despatches from Thos. MacDonagh […] to Mrs. Tom Clarke. […] brought messages back to Pk. Pearse [Patrick Pearse]."[41] Many of the women's testimonies are like this; quick, with a long list of those they carried messages to and from. Often, too, it was without break. "I was carrying despatches all the time," writes Brid Connolly; "My tine in the G.P.O was all the time doing messages."[42] The women faced near battlefield conditions, broken walls and houses, military barricades, all while dodging British snipers and possible arrest.[43] They continued their work as dispatchers, in spite of these conditions, with one observer noting, "Cumann na mBan girls did practically all the despatch carrying […] none of them returned unsuccessful. That was a point of honor with them– to succeed or be killed."[44] While none were killed in their jobs as couriers, the threat still existed, evidenced by the death of the nurse. As with nursing, couriers saw it as their duty to

[40] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 109.
[41] MSPC MSP34REF20238 (Maire Carron), Military Archives, Dublin.
[42] MSPC MSP34REF3977 (Brid Connolly), Military Archives, Dublin.
[43] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 41.
[44] Quoted in McCoole's *No Ordinary Women*, pg. 41.

support the Volunteers, which included running dispatches so that battalions could communicate with one another.

The women themselves often made passing reference to the dangers they faced. When describing her service, Mary Corcoran says, "I could not get into the City Hall as there was heavy firing. I handed in this dispatch under heavy fire."[45] Katie Beatty, in her sworn statement, recalls her superior officer Mrs. Rogers as saying, "The one thing I remember you were under fire the whole time." Beatty adds, "If you were in the G.P.O. or Four Courts you would have been safer, but we were out under fire, out on the streets, looking at the dead men lying on the street."[46] The women had no choice in where they were sent, though there is little evidence to support that they were against any assignments they were given. They seemed dutybound to support the Volunteers, even in dangerous conditions. Since dispatches were the only ways with which branches could communicate, the women's job was made all the more important.

Dispatches also carried the inherent danger of arrest, as the content of the dispatches was sensitive to the Rising. Eiliy O'Hanrahan decided eating her dispatch would be a better choice than allowing it to fall into the hands of the British after she had failed to have the message delivered. On the trip back to Dublin, she tore half of it up and disposed of it in a bathroom, eating the other half.[47] Other women took great pains to conceal their dispatches as they traveled to, from, and around Dublin during the Rising. Not only could their dispatches lead to their arrest; it could also lead to the arrest of others. The choice to destroy dispatches, especially in cases where they could not reach

[45] MSPC MSP34REF20325 (Mary Corcoran), Military Archives, Dublin.
[46] MSPC MSP34REF40382 (Katie Beatty), Military Archives, Dublin.
[47] BMH W.S. no. 270 (Eily O'Hanrahan O'Reilly), 7.

the person the message was intended for, was a practical one. It also exemplified how far women were willing to go to support the Volunteers in their endeavors. Whether out of a sense of duty or loyalty, women were thinking in the best interest of those men whom they served.

Part of being a courier also involved a much more dangerous cargo than even sensitive information: munitions. Besides providing First Aid equipment and delivering dispatches, the women were responsible for arming (or re-arming) the men who fought. This was the most dangerous of the courier jobs, as being caught with a rifle or ammunition could lead to a raid in addition to subsequent arrests, as the women would not be able to dispose of their cargo in the same way they could with dispatches. It could also lead to death, should the military find the women a threat. Mary Byrne was one of those who carried ammunition to garrisons across Dublin. In her summary, "she brought some of it each day down to the barricades and spent the rest of the day in a post cooking for the men."[48] Others had to hide ammunition within their coats as they crossed the barricades, hoping that the British would not subject them to a search. It was another side to the supportive role women took when acting as couriers. They not only facilitated communication, but also risked their lives to maintain these communication networks and provide ammunition for the Volunteers.

Cooking Behind the Lines

Those women not employed as dispatchers or nurses cooked for the men, especially in the G.P.O.[49] Ellen Ryan was shoring up her supplies of First Aid kits, knapsacks, and food for the rebels. "I had immense stores, and worked all day Easter

[48] MSPC MSP34REF2024 (Mary Byrne), Military Archives, Dublin.
[49] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 64.

Sunday making sandwiches and fitting knapsacks," she writes in her statement.[50] Ryan, like some other women, worked as both a cook and a supplier, as she worked part of the Rising from inside her house and the other part outside in the fighting. Annie Cooney, another member of Cumann na mBan, was part of a group that worked in the Marrowbone Lane Distillery. Unlike those members in the GPO, she recalls, "The members of Cumann na mBan had very little First Aid work to do… Our main activity was preparing food and generally looking after the welfare of the men."[51] Unlike nursing and carrying dispatches, this form of work called to mind the image of both the sweetheart and the camp followers. Though military officials often equated camp followers with prostitution, the women were more often the wives and sweethearts of those soldiers they followed, and they provided services unrelated to prostitution such as cooking and cleaning.[52] This definition of camp follower is closer to what the women of the Rising did. Josephine Ryan found herself, "carving, carving," up meat and other food for the men, which other girls distributed to the men at their posts.[53] Sheila Lynch, though not at the GPO, also shared similar duties. In her summary, "her duties were mainly concerned with the arranging of food for the Volunteers who had prisoners detained in an old R.I.C. Bks., directly opposite which had been taken over by the Volunteers" and "she also fitted up her own house with beds, and from this time to the end of the week […] she was busily engaged in cooking."[54] Sheila performed two duties: that of caring for prisoners of war and the men actively fighting, and that of taking care of the men fighting

[50] MSPC MSP34REF25310 (Ellen Ryan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[51] BMH W.S. no. 805 (Annie Cooney), 7.
[52] Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 40.
[53] BMH W.S. no. 399 (Mary Josephine Mulcahy), 15.
[54] MSPC MSP34REF9251 (Sheila Lynch), Military Archives, Dublin.

from her own home. This provided much needed support to the men on the front lines of the conflict, as she and other women acted as a form of respite in the way of their cooking. This, however, was early into the Rising operations, when food was easy to come by.

Unfortunately, as the fighting went on, food grew scarce, with women being the only ones able to venture out and obtain food, again because their gender might afford them some protection. It was a great risk, for like the other jobs, they could be shot or arrested.[55] Women went out on their bikes or on foot, searching Dublin for food they might take to provide for the men.[56] "I went to the Imperial for food," says Corcoran in her statement, " [But] I got very little at the Imperial."[57] Food was scarce enough that women often had to secure food from neighboring houses.[58] Another woman, Gretta Crosby, perhaps more accurately described what "collecting food" meant. In her written statement, she recalls, "I went out and commandeered food with another member prepared beds and cooked for boys…"[59] Like the nurses, women showed little reluctance in obtaining food supplies in this way, as it was only their duty. The choice to do so was treated as a necessity for the good of the Volunteer force and the good of the women, who also needed to take care of themselves, however minimally, in order to continue performing their jobs. This included such actions as commandeering cows for milk and meat, as well as rationing out food.[60]

[55] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 41.
[56] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 64.
[57] MSPC MSP34REF20325 (Mary Corcoran), Military Archives, Dublin.
[58] MSPC MSP34REF60152 (Ellen Dooley), Military Archives, Dublin.
[59] MSPC MSP34REF30192 (Gretta Crosby), Military Archives, Dublin.
[60] McCarthy, *Cumann na mBan*, 6.

Fear spread to other members who heard of what was happening, with some girls refusing to work in the Four Courts, where food was the scarcest. Pauline Keating recalls, "Many of the girls were unwilling to go there as they were afraid they would be starved out."[61] This was a rare occurrence, however. Most of the women fulfilled their duty to the best of their ability, even when it meant putting themselves in danger of being fired upon or starving. Keating's statement, however, also shows some underlying tensions within the supportive dynamic Cumann na mBan embraced. Not every woman was willing to die for the cause, or at the very least, suffer for it.

There were other troubles too, mostly with other women who supported the war effort and did not approve of nationalist women's involvement with the Rising. Christina Doyle "was attacked by a lot of women who used bad language and threatened her," when she left to collect food on Easter Sunday. They even followed her to the house of a friend, who was waiting with food for the rebels, and threatened to have it wrecked.[62] The Rising, just like the nationalist organizations, was not universally popular, and many women who favored Home Rule were wary of Cumann na mBan, which they saw as too militant. Dublin was still largely in support of Home Rule, and previous disagreements and tensions between the two camps came to a head during the Rising. Adding to those tensions was the chaos the Rising had caused, leading to the destruction of many buildings, homes, and streets, and generally disrupting life in Dublin.[63] Annie Cooney remembers it was especially bad after the Rising, as she marched with the men who had surrendered:

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[61] BMH W.S. no. 432 (Pauline Keating), 3.
[62] MSPC MSP34REF60194 (Christina Doyle), Military Archives, Dublin.
[63] Hill, *Women in Ireland*,

> There were two lines of armed soldiers marching at each side of us, for which we were presently thankful, as we would have been torn to pieces by the 'separation' women who followed us, shouting out abuse and obscene language at us. They were kept at bay by the soldiers.[64]

Other women report the same thing, with "separation" women verbally, and sometimes physically, attempting to assault the Volunteers and those associated with them during and after the Rising. Separation women were those who favored Home Rule and often supported the call for Ireland to aid Britain in World War I. Geraldine Dillon, sister to Joseph Plunkett, recalls how these women "crowded around the Post Office, and abused the Volunteers inside, throwing glass from the broken windows [of a nearby shop] at them."[65] By then, the Volunteers had taken several major buildings in Dublin, including the GPO, City Hall, and the Four Courts (Dublin's court buildings). Cumann na mBan was scorned by separation women for their refusal to support the war effort, seen as more important than nationalist aims. Too militant and supporting an unpopular side, Cumann na mBan and associated women represented the wrong way to go about encouraging political change.

Thus, in all their jobs, the women faced threats to their lives. Their allegiance to the Volunteers would cost them, especially as the Rising intensified and in the immediate aftermath. Though their roles were only in a supportive capacity, the British military would not underestimate their contributions to the Volunteers, even though the women would be dismissed as nothing more but camp followers.

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[64] BMH W.S. no. 805 (Annie Cooney), 10.
[65] BMH W.S. no. 358 (Geraldine Dillon), 18.

The Military Influence on the Home

Even the home was not safe from the Rising or its effects. Some women had their houses raided during the rebellion as part of the British effort to seize important documents and evidence. Peig Conlon, who took part as a nurse, recalls, "I went home then and the military were up there and raided our house."[66] She grew worried because there were incriminating documents and the names of some men, which could aid the British arrests.[67] She suffered the consequences of association with a nationalist organization. The British were trying to arrest as many people as they could in a severe crackdown on the Volunteers and all its associates. Áine Ceannt, married to Volunteer leader Eamonn Ceannt, had to leave her own home, as it was "in the line of fire." Even after leaving her home, she was not safe: "Early on Friday morning we were awakened by military raiding the premises. Naturally they were wondering at finding so many women in the house but no men…"[68] She and the owner of the house lied, stating their husbands were away on business; the British, thankfully, did not question her further. Ceannt and her housemates, remained on high alert the rest of the Rising, however.

Women also opened up their homes to Volunteers as the fighting continued. Susan Burke was not officially part of the mobilized forces of Cumann na mBan, but "during the whole of the week [her] family gave every possible help to the Volunteers by providing meals and sleeping facilities."[69] Theresa Keegan, sister to Ellen Keegan, offered up their home as a temporary headquarters for the rebellion in the early stages on

[66] MSPC MSP34REF21093 (Peig Conlon), Military Archives, Dublin.
[67] MSPC MSP34REF21093 (Peig Conlon), Military Archives, Dublin.
[68] BMH W.S. no. 264 (Áine Ceannt), 31.
[69] MSPC MSP34REF57549 (Susan Burke), Military Archives, Dublin.

Sunday.[70] As women opened up their homes, they risked raids, arrest, and even destruction of their family property. As the British forces could not distinguish between allies and enemies, they indiscriminately fired upon houses and other buildings in an attempt to drive out the rebels.[71]

Militarization is prevalent here, too, because this association with the Volunteers or any nationalist body exemplifies how far reaching its effects could be perceived. The British considered women a threat through their associations with nationalist movements. Irish nationalism was a threat to British control over the isle, and thus, the home, wherein Irish values were inculcated, was a dangerous target. The women who tended to those homes could not be considered innocent. They hid ammunition and rifles, dispatches, and important documents within their domain, bringing the military inside. As masters of their domain, women would have to know what was going on, or at least suspect any seditious activities.

In the Aftermath

The Rising failed, as British brutally suppressed the rebel forces. Outmanned and outgunned, those left had no other choice but to surrender, including the women. Patrick Pearse and the rest of the Volunteer leaders officially surrendered April 29, almost a full week after the Rising had begun. In the immediate aftermath of the Rising, some women tried to destroy or hide sensitive documents and other paraphernalia. Gretta Crosby recalls, "I returned as ordered to headquarters helped to hide everything of value and also to prevent arrest of men."[72] Like Conlon, she and others knew their houses were at risk

[70] MSPC MSP34REF22205 (Theresa Keegan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[71] McGarry, *The Rising*, 183.
[72] MSPC MSP34REF30192 (Gretta Crosby), Military Archives, Dublin.

for raiding simply through their involvement with the Volunteers. Any papers that had not been destroyed prior to the Rising were hidden or destroyed now. Those papers could also be used against the Volunteers, who now faced imprisonment for their actions.

As news of the surrender spread, some Volunteer garrisons gave women the chance to leave before the British arrived to arrest them. The Volunteers, out of a sense of duty, chose not to run away from this fate, but rather face it. This stemmed from both their nationalist convictions and the fact that many simply refused to surrender, despite Pearse's orders to do so.[73] These same Volunteers did not want the women arrested alongside them, as they considered them merely support, and therefore not culpable of treason.[74] The men also thought the women should not bear the brunt of their actions by nature of their gender, and some women were even encouraged to leave before the surrender as it would dishearten the men to see them arrested.[75]

Following this surrender, those stationed at the Four Courts were arrested, as they had not been able to escape. Women at the Marrowbone Lane Distillery, on the other hand, chose arrest over the escape the Volunteers offered them.[76] They disagreed with Volunteer leadership that they should not bear some responsibility for the Rising. As an auxiliary, their support had made the Rising possible. For them, that was enough to qualify them for arrest. Tensions between the two groups strained the subordinate relationship Cumann na mBan, and women in general, had with the Volunteers. Unlike those who had left to avoid disheartening the men, these women were steadfast in their belief that their subordination did not lessen their culpability. When the British forces

[73] McGarry, *The Rising*, 248.
[74] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 1114.
[75] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 114.
[76] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 46.

came to escort them, they chose to march alongside the men. In total, seventy-seven women were arrested.

Ellen Costigan was one of those detained at the Four Courts, and though she was unable to give her testimony due to her untimely death, a friend– Maire Carron–related that they were, "detained in the Four Courts until Sunday morning when we were removed to Richmond Barracks and later to Kilmainham Gaol."[77] Kilmainham Gaol– formerly an infamous, often overcrowded, convict prison– had been turned into army detention barracks at the start of World War I. The British forces detained most of the Volunteers and women there until they were sentenced or sent elsewhere to serve out their prison sentences. Women recalled their impression of the jail as dismal, as the Rising had caused gas to be shut off in the building, leaving candles as the only light for the prisoners there. To make matters worse, the women were housed, often three to four in a cell meant for two, in one of the older wings in a state of disrepair.[78]

The prison later became more infamous as the location of the Rising leaders' executions. The first sentenced and executed were the (male) leaders who were also members of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic: Patrick Pearse, Thomas Clarke, Joseph Plunkett, James Connolly, Thomas MacDonagh, Sean McDermott, and Eamonn Ceannt.[79] The Provisional Government of the Irish Republic had been officially established at the start of the Rising, with the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, which functioned as a declaration of independence from Britain. Eight more men were court

[77] MSPC MSP34REF16216 (Ellen Costigan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[78] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 49.
[79] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 47.

martialed and also executed by firing squad. Some of the women were unaware that the leaders were housed in Kilmainham, only finding out when they heard shots fired.[80]

Among these women arrested were Elizabeth Cooney and Maire Carron, who was, "taken prisoner on the evening of the 29th of April, and detained in Four Courts until 30th April, when I was removed to Richmond Bks. with the other girls and four member of the I.V."[81] Interestingly, Carron calls herself a "prisoner of war," the only woman to do so. In Maria Clince's sworn statement, it is the interviewer who asks if she was a prisoner, to which she replies yes.[82] In most of the women's statements, however, they do not refer to themselves as such. It is difficult to ascertain why the majority did not consider themselves prisoners of war (POW), whether it was because they did not consider the Rising to be a war or because they did not consider themselves on par with being called a POW. The stance of the women in Marrowbone Lane Distillery, however, seems to at least negate the latter. In the interest of presenting a nuanced view of the women, however, it is necessary to realize that most did not explicitly label themselves as POWs in the aftermath of the Rising.

Upon their arrival to Kilmainham Gaol, Pauline Keating recalls, "[The jailor] brought us to a doorway and pointed to the inscription above it: 'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come to thee'. There was a violent protest from us girls. We shouted at him that we had not sinned."[83] In the eyes of some, however, they had. It was their refusal to conform, to be good girls and stay out of politics, that had landed them in trouble. For the women who were incarcerated, however, there was no shame in it. Imprisonment was

[80] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 50.
[81] MSPC MSP34REF20238 (Maire Carron), Military Archives, Dublin.
[82] MSPC MSP34REF4997 (Maria Clince), Military Archives, Dublin.
[83] BMH W.S. no. 432 (Pauline Keating), 5.

part of the Irish revolutionary tradition and to be imprisoned for such an offense was an honor rather than a transgression.[84] Still, in the decades after, they suffered for their decision to be a part of the nationalist movement. The same women who had assaulted them during the Rising continued their harassment far into the aftermath of the Easter Rising.[85] Often, their abuse was relegated to throwing both words and physical objects at the nationalist women, but other times, it could grow more dangerous. There was a fear of these 'separation' women attacking the very homes the nationalist women lived in.[86]

Even those who evaded arrest could still suffer consequences, however. In her pension file, Elizabeth Corcoran states, "I was in a Public Library and I was brought before a committee and dismissed […] for being a Sinn Feiner."[87] She is corroborated by one of her references, Annie Ward, who also writes that, "On her return home, she was dismissed from her post in the Belfast Public Libraries."[88] Teresa Byrne suffered a similar fate. As part of the Hibernian Rifles, she took part in active combat during the Rising. Subsequently, "I was dismissed from my employment for my part in the fight and did not get another part till 1918 as I could not get a reference from those who dismissed me."[89] Like those women who had been imprisoned, they suffered for what many viewed as a transgression against their duties for the British war effort. Though the women had largely conformed to their gender roles throughout the conflict, their political radicalism exposed them to abuse in the immediate aftermath of the Rising. It mattered little to the people of Dublin that women had largely operated within the confines of appropriate

[84] Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 195.
[85] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 195.
[86] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women*, 195.
[87] MSPC MSP34REF10854 (Elizabeth Corr), Military Archives, Dublin.
[88] MSPC MSP34REF10854 (Elizabeth Corr), Military Archives, Dublin.
[89] MSPC MSP34REF55038 (Teresa Byrne), Military Archives, Dublin.

militarized femininity; people had homes were destroyed, daily lives disrupted, and 260 civilians had lost their lives in the general confusion surrounding the Rising.[90] Cumann na mBan and what remained of the Volunteers were forced to keep a low profile.

Newspapers, too, aided in the initial outrage and dismissal of the Easter Rising. Many of the popular Dublin newspapers chose to ignore the Easter Rising, at least at first. When they finally did address it, their articles often sought to discredit the Volunteers.[91] The *Freeman's Journal* was one such newspaper, publishing an article wherein it dedicated a column to discredit the rebellion. "For years a number of individuals and an influential section of the Irish Press have been sleeplessly at work to destroy the Constitutional Movement by poisoning the minds of the people against Mr. Redmond's leadership and the Irish Parliamentary Party and policy," reads an article dated May 6, 1916.[92] It goes on further, "In pursuit of this policy no means were considered too base or unscrupulous."[93] The bloodshed was not viewed as necessary, nor was it heroic. In fact, many of the newspapers reflected the attitude of Dubliners at the time: the Easter Rising had been an unnecessary inconvenience, rather than an important event. The *Irish Press*, attacked by the *Freeman's Journal* in the above quote, wrote its own rebuttal of the article and rebuked those behind the Easter Rising. "We owe the complete suppression of sedition in Ireland, not only to ourselves, but to our brave soldiers in France, the United Kingdom, and to the whole Empire," says the article, going further to say that control should not yet be handed over to the Irish officials working for the crown.[94] With each

[90] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 75.
[91] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*,
[92] *The Freeman's Journal*, "The True Causes of the Sinn Fein Insurrection," May 1916
[93] *The Freeman's Journal*, "The True Causes of the Sinn Fein Insurrection," May 1916.
[94] *Irish Press*, "Rebellion and After," May 6, 1916, pg. 38.

article, the work of both the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan continued to be discredited and pushed aside in favor of supporting the troops who had 'liberated' Dublin from the rebels.

A Return to Fundraising

Those women who had escaped the arrests turned back to their fundraising duties. Women made sure to take care of those dependents who had been left without a husband to care for them and their children. Mary Corcoran, of the Irish Citizen Army (at the time), recalls that in the immediate aftermath, the ICA "had nothing to do with the dependents but every week we used to go to workmen and make a weekly collection for sending parcels and things."[95] Theresa Keegan also aided in the collection of these funds. Her reference states, "she had care of arms that were saved, and she was an earnest and energetic collector for the National Aid Funds."[96] The possibility of arrest had been prevalent in the leaders' minds. Thus, some plans had already been set in the event that a large majority of the Volunteers were arrested.[97] Keegan and Corcoran were among those who worked following the Rising to collect funds and support those who were left without. Mary Ellen Doyle also took up the mantle following the rising, "collecting for the prisoners dependents [sic]."[98]

These creation of these funds reveals how women's duty to the Volunteers factored in even after the Rising had ended. Without prompting, women returned to their pre-conflict duties, taking up the mantle now that many of the Volunteers had been incarcerated. They chose to continue working despite the lack of leadership from the

[95] MSPC MSP34REF20325 (Mary Corcoran), Military Archives, Dublin.
[96] MSPC MSP34REF22205 (Theresa Keegan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[97] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 119.
[98] MSPC MSP34REF26225 (Mary Ellen Doyle), Military Archives, Dublin.

Volunteers' organization. While plans for this had been set, the women were under no pressure to adopt the plans for fundraising. Most chose to do it out of a sense of duty to those who had served the cause. Women organized themselves to form the Irish Volunteer Dependents' Fund, appointing leadership and taking charge.[99] The endeavor, though completely undertaken by women for women and other dependents, still fell into subordinate category, however, because it was still in service to the Volunteers.

Collection was not just relegated to Dublin and those families wherein. Around Ireland, collections were made for any affected by the Rising, including Wexford, Cork County. Ellen Ryan was one of the women in charge of these collections. In her sworn statement, she recalls, "I had regular collections and looked after the dependents in the country districts. I divided the money more in the country districts."[100] In her case, she began her collections duties following her arrest and release. Notably, she did so in rural districts, where the loss of a husband could make life more difficult.[101] When it came to the Rising, the countryside was often forgotten, too, making the need for funding there more desperate.[102]

Cumann na mBan could no longer afford to be as militant, especially as women had been arrested for their participation, and the danger of raids and arrest was more prevalent than before. The British forces had seen what the Irish were capable of; now they were determined to keep it from happening again. Yet, that did not mean their militarization faded. If anything, it was reinforced as women collected funds for those in prison and their families, continued gathering and hiding arms, and hid and distributed

[99] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 119.
[100] MSPC MSP34REF25310 (Ellen Ryan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[101] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 46.
[102] McGarry, *The Rising*, 210.

prohibited pro-Irish propaganda. Their work would take them through the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War, work that later helped the women in applying for pensions.

Chapter 3: The Pension Acts

In the decades following the Rising, legislation was introduced to establish pensions and compensations for those who participated and aided in the fight for Ireland's independence, including Cumann na mBan. Four main series of laws, passed in 1923, 1924, 1934, and 1949, respectively, were drawn up in regard to the Easter Rising and the Irish War for Independence. The acts were not without problems, but the ability of women to apply for pensions marked a small, but important step, in acknowledging women's participation in revolutionary-era activities. The recognition, however, would be of less importance than the need for financial assistance, expressed by many women in their applications.

In the months after the rebellion, Cumann na mBan and other nationalists slowly regrouped and re-formed to continue pursuing the cause of an independent Ireland. By 1917, the Volunteers had regrouped and joined Sinn Féin as its military branch; henceforth they were the Irish Republican Army (IRA).[1] In 1917 and 1918, Cumann na mBan and the IRA operated within Sinn Fein, pushing the nationalist agenda without actively mobilizing or marching in military-like demonstrations as they had prior to the Rising.

In January of 1919, however, two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) were shot by IRA members in an unsanctioned ambush. The attack sparked the beginning of the Irish War of Independence. Fought 1919 to 1921 between British and IRA forces, it was primarily a guerrilla war that ended with a truce, followed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December of that year.[2] The Treaty established the Irish Free State, partitioning

[1] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 65.
[2] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 154.

Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. Unfortunately, the treaty fractured the Irish public opinion, with many not in favor of it, especially those in Cumann na mBan.[3] The assassination of the security advisor to Northern Ireland by two IRA members sparked the Irish Civil War in 1922, wherein die-hard nationalists fought against pro-Treaty forces over the validity of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.[4] In the end, the nationalists would lose. The Provincial Government, now established as the governing body of Ireland, set about consolidating its power through various legislative acts. It also sought to quell future unrest among its constituents through the creation and implementation of the pension acts, which rewarded male participants in Ireland's multiple conflicts for their service.

The 1923 Act

In June of 1923, the Oireachtas of Saorstát Éireann (also known as the Oireachtas, or Legislature, of the Irish Free State) decided to compensate those wounded during the Easter Rising and the widows and children of those who died during that same event.[5] This led to the Army Pensions Act of 1923. In order to qualify, the person applying had to have been a member of Óglaigh na hÉireann (or the Defense Forces), which included those of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, or the widow of one such member.[6] Successful applicants proved they had actively served, or that a family member had been killed or wounded, during those conflicts.

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[3] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 89.
[4] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 90.
[5] "Origin and Scope," in "About the Collection," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland, accessed December 9, 2018, http://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection-1916-1923/about-the-collection/origin-and-scope.
[6] "Legislation," in "About the Collection," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland, accessed December 9, 2018,

Under the 1923 Army Pensions Act, only one woman applied: Margaret Skinnider. Having sustained several gunshot wounds during the Rising, Margaret Skinnider sought to earn some form of compensation for what she saw as a service to her country.[7] She tried first under the 1923 act, then again in the 1930s. The 1923 form reads: "This form is to be filled in by every ex-member of the Irish Volunteers or Irish Citizen Army, 1916, who claims pension… in respect of a wound or injury received whilst performing his duty… prior to 1st April, 1922."[8] If the language therein is read with the Interpretation Act in mind – which established that the use of the word 'persons' in legislature could be interpreted to include women– Skinnider's application seems to meet the criteria.

Working against her, and noted in her file, however, are the facts that, "This lady has been a very prominent Irregular since 1922, and was arrested in possession of a revolver and ammunition… She is at present stated to be Chief Officer of the Cumann na mBan."[9] Skinnider was not only an anti-Treatyite, but she still retained connections to Cumann na mBan whose members the government was not prepared to reward. Her application was rejected, the Army Finance officer, E. Fahy, saying of the matter: "The preamble to the Army Pensions Act, 1923… presumably contemplates that the deceased members shall be of the male sex. It would be illogical, therefore, to include the female sex under the term 'wounded members.'"[10] He emphasized this point twice more in his letter of explanation. Skinnider reacted with shock, writing to the pensions department, "I

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http://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection-1916-1923/about-the-collection/legislation.

[7] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 921.

[8] MSPC MSP34REF19910 (Margaret Skinnider), Military Archives, Dublin.

[9] MSPC MSP34REF19910 (Margaret Skinnider), Military Archives, Dublin.

[10] MSPC MSP34REF19910 (Margaret Skinnider), Military Archives, Dublin.

am at a loss to understand the reason for this decision."[11] She reapplied under the 1932 Army Pensions Act, which specifically included Cumann na mBan and was awarded her disability pension in 1937, with the following year seeing her awarded a military service pension for £80 as well.[12]

The 1924 Act

Next came the Military Service Pensions Act of 1924. Introduced by the pro-Treaty government, the 1924 act was for service alone, rather than death or injury, a departure from the language of the 1923 act.[13] Furthermore, the 1924 act sought to award pensions to those who supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty while also pacifying nationalist men who had fought in the civil war years and were unhappy with the current government.[14] This stance reflected the tensions between the die-hard nationalists, like the Volunteers (now IRA) and Cumann na mBan, and those who had settled for the treaty splitting Ireland in two. In her work on the pension acts, Marie Coleman noted, "The strong anti-Treaty line adopted by Cumann na mBan is seen as having soured the attitude of the… government towards women, and influencing the restrictive legislation… during the 1920s."[15]

The act of 1924 established a Board of Assessors, chaired by Justice Cyril Beatty, B.L., a Justice of the District court, along with three other men, including a retired Lt. General as Secretary of the Board.[16] In total, the Board approved 3,855 applicants for pension, with another approximate 9,800 applicants who were deemed prima facie cases,

[11] MSPC MSP34REF19910 (Margaret Skinnider), Military Archives, Dublin.
[12] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries." 923.
[13] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 919.
[14] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 919.
[15] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 919.
[16] "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.

but ultimately did not fall under that act.[17] According the MSPC site, "The amount of pension payable varied according to the rank… based on the rank structure of the National Forces/Defence Forces, with a sum of £5 applying per year of service and per Grade awarded."[18] The act calculated that active service throughout (i.e. continuous service, excepting imprisonment for said service) amounted to fourteen years, with the Easter Rising counting as four years alone.[19] Thus, the maximum amount of pension awarded could be £350.00.[20]

In regard to this act, only one woman qualified: Dr. Brigid Lyons, who had served as an army doctor during the period between 1922 and 1924 and worked with Cumann na mBan during the Rising. She applied for pension but was rejected on the basis of her gender.[21] When the bill was debated in Dáil Éireann, or Irish Parliament, W.T. Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council (prime minister) and the leader of the Cumann na nGaedheal, was asked the question of whether the word 'person' included women (as this would have included women who were affected by the service of their husbands in the conflict). His response: "The word 'person' refers to males."[22] In a later debate, the issue would come up again. Colonel Moore, a senator of the Dáil Éireann, proposed an amendment, "to insert in the third line… the words 'of either sex.'"[23] He further argued

[17] Prima facie cases were those cases deemed possible candidates for pension. "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.
[18] "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.
[19] "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.
[20] "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.
[21] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 920.
[22] Dáil Debates, vol. 8. (15 July 1924), col. 1266.
[23] MSPC W24SP13615 (Brigid Lyons), Military Archives, Dublin.

that women had done an extraordinary service during the time of the Rising and the civil war, thus they should be included. "Many of these women have suffered in mind and body as a result of [their involvement], and to a certain extent are broken down from the work they did."[24] This amendment was rejected, too and thus, for a while, Lyons' application was also rejected. At the time of her application's rejection, Lyons was suffering from tuberculosis and undergoing treatment.[25] "I have no hopes myself but I know you will not forget me if there is any chance. It would mean such a lot if I had something definite to rely on," she wrote in a letter to Cosgrave in 1926.[26] Eventually, however, Lyons reapplied, and the initial rejection was reversed under the Interpretation Act of 1923, which stated that "words importing the masculine gender shall include females."[27] Lyons was not the only one who struggled to gain her pension, however.

Lyons' and Skinnider's gender came to be one of their largest hindrances, as the language did not account for women participants. Though the acts used the gender-neutral 'persons,' the male leadership wrote the acts and chose to interpret them as they saw fit. In contrast with each other, however, the two women's struggles reveal the underlying political tensions that also made it difficult for some to receive their pension. Lyons was well-connected to the government and had supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty; Skinnider had not.[28] Thus, people on Lyons' behalf were able to leverage her connections and influence as a supporter of the Treaty to gain her pension. That still did not expedite her application completely, but it helped when Lyons reapplied. Meanwhile Skinnider

[24] MSPC W24SP13615 (Brigid Lyons), Military Archives, Dublin.
[25] MSPC W24SP13615 (Brigid Lyons), Military Archives, Dublin.
[26] MSPC W24SP13615 (Brigid Lyons), Military Archives, Dublin.
[27] Quoted in Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 921.
[28] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 922.

had a more challenging time because of her political affiliations. Arguably, those tensions featured more prominently in the creation and implementation of these acts than the tensions between genders. Though gender was certainly a factor, for the men creating these acts, their main focus was political. The acts of 1923 and 1924 first and foremost served as pacification measures for the male population. Similar scenarios played out across the pension applications following the 1934 act.

The 1934 Act

It was the Military Pensions Act of 1934 that first included Cumann na mBan.[29] Created as an amendment to and extension of the 1924 act, the 1934 pension law also allowed those who had only pre-Treaty service to apply as well.[30] The original 1924 act had excluded women who served in the Irish Citizens Army since service following the Rising, from 1917 to 1922, was needed to qualify in 1924.[31] Notably, the 1934 act also originally did not include Cumann na mBan, but a later amendment added it soon after the act was put into place.[32] Cumann na mBan members, however, were relegated to the two lowest possible ranks for pension– D and E.[33] Grade A, for reference, referred to any rank higher than Major General, while Grade E referred to the rank for Privates and Non-Commissioned Officers.[34] Everything else established under the 1924 act, including the worth of a year's uninterrupted service (£5), was kept.

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[29] "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.
[30] "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.
[31] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 920.
[32] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 923.
[33] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 923. Previously, under the 1924 act, Grade A had referred to the lowest and Grade E to the highest.
[34] "The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.

Applicants had to fill out forms detailing their branch, the terms of their service, and what they performed while within the service. With their applications, women were also required to provide references to corroborate their service. Letters and other forms of evidence were also collected, to be provided with the application or given to the interviewer during their oral testimony. Following this, these applicants gave oral testimony under oath typed up in a question–answer format.[35] Applicants were either successful or unsuccessful in their appeals. Often, the committee gathered material that could support the claims made by the applicants, such as testimonies or membership rosters, and thus aid the committee in making a decision.[36]

In the case of these women, many provided membership rosters, personal testimonies, and testimonies from their commanders or fellow members to prove their service. Their success was based on how convincing these testimonies were. Women who were not successful the first time could reapply in the hopes of earning a pension the second time, if not under the 1934 act, then again under the 1949 act. Many women applied and reapplied in the hopes of receiving what they thought was their due. Still, if the likes of Lyons and Skinnider had difficulty gaining pensions, there seemed to be little hope for the ordinary women applying.

Pensions and Poverty

Mary Adrien, who applied under the 1934 act, served in the Fingal Company during Easter Week as a scout and dispatch carrier. Further into the application form, she

[35] ""The Military Service Pension Acts Explained," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland.
[36] "Origin and Scope," in "About the Collection," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland, accessed December 9, 2018, http://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection-1916-1923/about-the-collection/origin-and-scope.

wrote, “I made no application whatever before now, but I refused to allow my name to be submitted for pension under the 1923 act.”[37] As part of the Fingal Company (or Fifth Battalion), Adrien may have qualified under that act since that company was with the Irish Volunteers and not Cumann na mBan. Her statement, however, suggests her reasoning when she writes, “I refused to claim a pension… when requested by the late James Derham. My reasons were that at the time I had a means of livelihood… and that to allot pensions to ablebodied people with means of living, was beginning at the wrong end.”[38] Adrien is the only woman to explicitly state why she did not apply for pension earlier, but it reveals something about how women viewed the pension. For them, pensions were a means of livelihood rather than recognition for their efforts. It provided them with a modest form of income, allowing the women to live self-sufficiently, and helped keep them from poverty. The 1920s and 30s in the Irish Free State saw high unemployment and economic stagnation.[39] In addition, married women rarely worked, with only 5.6 percent actively employed within the Irish Free State.[40] Women’s only source of income was their husbands. To further illustrate the plight of women, Margaret Mary Pearse, sister to Patrick Pearse, wrote from the Dáil Éireann, where she held a position, urging that the assessors hurry with Adrien’s application as, “her health is beginning to fail.”[41] Furthermore, in another letter, Vera MacDonnell writes Eamon de Burca, the current Secretary of Defense, that Adrien is “in difficulties at present as regards payment of Rates.”[42] While Adrien was granted her pension, she had to appeal

[37] MSPC MSP34REF152 (Mary Adrien), Military Archives, Dublin.
[38] MSPC MSP34REF152 (Mary Adrien), Military Archives, Dublin.
[39] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 99.
[40] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 100.
[41] MSPC MSP34REF152 (Mary Adrien), Military Archives, Dublin.
[42] MSPC MSP34REF152 (Mary Adrien), Military Archives, Dublin.

when the board of assessors did not give her pension for her work during the Irish War of Independence.

Without their pensions, some women could face the possibility of dying in poverty, especially as some had lost their husbands in subsequent years following the Rising to either imprisonment or death.[43] Katie Daly (later Beatty), wrote to the Board of Assessors, "I am a widow in real need of financial help."[44] The delay in processing applications seemed to pose a problem for many of the women, especially those like Beatty who were in desperate financial situations and needed the money soon. "I would feel very grateful," wrote Kathleen Brennan, "if you could do anything for me to get it granted now as I am very hard hit at the present time."[45] Another letter, sent after she had received her pension and marked URGENT, further underscores the financial struggles she was facing. Similarly, Teresa Healy also faced hardship. With her husband out of work and in charge of six children, she urged the board to consider her application and expedite it so she might be able to use the funds to take care of her family.[46] Luckily for her, she was able to receive her pension soon after.

Even prominent members of the Rising were not immune to the economic circumstances that befell Ireland during the 1934 and 1949 acts. The need for pension showed in Kathleen Clarke's statement regarding her delay in applying for the pension as a dependent of Tom Clarke: "I felt I did not require it but, as my circumstances have changed considerably since that time, I would be glad if my application could now be

[43] McGarry, "Hard Service," *Remembering 1916,* 97.
[44] MSPC MSP34REF40382 (Katie Beatty), Military Archives, Dublin.
[45] MSPC MSP34REF58865 (Kathleen Brennan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[46] MSPC MSP34REF55038 (Teresa Byrne), Military Archives, Dublin.

considered."[47] Nora Connolly O'Brien, too, was in dire need of pension. Following her husband's loss of his job, she applied, writing to the board: "We are absolutely on the rocks. This week will see the end of us unless I have something definite to count upon."[48] Clarke, called to testify before the board, supported her claim, stating, "They have nothing. It is an awful position for James Connolly's daughter."[49] The almost begging tone of the letters reveal that many women had little rank or prestige to use as leverage to the board. Though Clarke and Connolly were well-known revolutionaries, their status afforded them little in the way of pension.

Lacking any form of a social security system or welfare, which would have supported the women in their times of hardship during the Depression-era and World War II, these women seemingly turned to pensions as a last resort. In her study of the pensions, Marie Coleman comes to the same conclusion.[50] Perhaps this is why some women were even encouraged by friends and family to apply. In a letter to May Kavanaugh (addressed as Mrs. Duggan in the letter), her friend writes, "Well, Mrs. D. I hope you applied for a Military Service Certificate and if you did there is nothing could give me greater pleasure than Certify [sic] that you were [working] Day and Night doing everything in your power [to aid the Rising]."[51] May, herself, wrote to the board as well, imploring that they expedite her claim as she was in need of money.[52] On top of this hardship, World War II brought further shortages of gas, food, and other supplies.[53]

[47] MSPC MSP34REF61087 (Kathleen Clarke), Military Archives, Dublin.
[48] MSPC MSP34REF59637 (Nora Connolly-O'Brien), Military Archives, Dublin.
[49] MSPC MSP34REF59637 (Nora Connolly-O'Brien), Military Archives, Dublin.
[50] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 927.
[51] MSPC MSP34REF20457 (May Duggan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[52] MSPC MSP34REF20457 (May Duggan), Military Archives, Dublin.
[53] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 120.

For women, pensions were less about recognition as they were about financial stability, unlike their male counterparts. For men, the pensions were a way of recognizing their service, with the added benefit of aiding them financially.[54] This was a far cry from a heroic narrative for women, especially as they faced poverty. Unfortunately, most of the pensions these women received were a negligible sum. The majority of the women did not receive more than a year or two of service's worth of pension. The lowest amount awarded appeared to be an annual pension of approximately £8.[55] The highest pension under the 1924 act, awarded to Dr. Brigid Lyons, was £123, though unlike the other women who applied, she was not relegated to the lowest rank as a member of the Irish Citizens Army. Instead her pension reflected her 8 years' service as a Commandant in the ICA.[56] Under the 1934 act, the highest pension was £112, awarded to Leslie Barry (née Price), Cumann na mBan member and wife of renowned IRA leader, Tom Barry.[57]

This small amount seemed insignificant, especially considering the financial straits many of the women found themselves in. These negligible amounts, however, also show how little the Irish Free State government (and the government succeeding that) seemed to care for its women and their contributions. The focus was on the men as makers of the Irish Free State.[58] In them, Ireland could find a heroic narrative, one where recognition mattered. There was a sort of prestige associated with being one of those who participated in the Rising.[59] These pensions also showed how politics further complicated the situation, as it had for Lyons and Skinnider. The acts were meant to pacify male

[54] Coleman, " 'There are thousands'," 490.
[55] MSPC MPS34REF24077 (Mary White), Military Archives, Dublin.
[56] MSPC W24SP13615 (Brigid Lyons), Military Archives, Dublin.
[57] MSPC MSP34REF26980 (Leslie Barry), Military Archives, Dublin.
[58] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 929.
[59] Coleman, "'There are thousands'," 488.

revolutionaries and dissolve lingering political opposition, so they excluded women on principle; they were also meant to pacify men who fought for the Treaty. As Cumann an mBan had chosen to back a fully independent Ireland, not a partitioned one, their activities excluded them on both the basis of gender and politics. It was a case of backing the wrong side, compounded by the fact that Ireland had no place for its female revolutionaries, even for women who had stuck to traditionally gendered forms of work as rebels.

Obstacles

Proving active service could also be difficult, and Cumann na mBan members appear to have suffered from this requirement.[60] Furthermore, none of the assessors ever appointed were women.[61] Instead, the assessors usually consisted of men, one an experienced lawyer, and a group of four other men, presumably political allies with whatever party was in power.[62] For those who applied from Dublin, most were able to get their pensions, especially because it was not essential to the application if the man had taken part in the actual fighting, only needing to be "members of a garrison of a fortified military post."[63] Those men and women who had participated in the Rising outside of Dublin, the city and the county found it harder to earn the right to their pensions.[64] Further examples of this favoritism can be found throughout the pension files.[65] Mary Cullen participated in Cumann na mBan in Enniscorthy, County Wexford. Unlike the women in Dublin, she had a much harder time proving her active service, despite the fact

[60] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 924.
[61] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 925.
[62] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 925.
[63] Coleman, "'There are thousands'," 494.
[64] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 926.
[65] Coleman, "'There are thousands'," 494.

she had her Easter Week service accounted for by another Cumann na mBan member, Mary White, and several other references. Her friends beseeched the assessors reconsider her case in light of additional evidence they had provided on her behalf.[66] While she unsuccessfully petitioned for active service from Easter Week to 1919, she was able to receive pension for her work during the Rising. Elizabeth Corr, a Cumann na mBan member from Belfast, also suffered similarly. Upon hearing that Ina Connolly had just received her pension, she wrote to the board, "If she is considered entitled to a pension, then so am I, as she was one of six girls, of which I was another, who accompanied a contingent of Volunteers."[67] She would go on to write bitterly, "I have been told it would be useless to get statements confirming my claim for the years 1917-1922, although my work… during that time was both necessary and important."[68] Eventually, the board would award her 1 5/7 years' service, or for about three days of the Rising. Mobilization may have also had an effect on the women. Unlike their male counterparts, the Volunteers, only some of the women were arrested and there were few records that verified women participated in the Rising.[69] This could have exacerbated the problem of proving active service, as most branches were not officially mobilized. References were the only way to prove that women had indeed participated in the Rising, and even then, it could be difficult to prove.

For women like Kathleen Clarke or the Connolly sisters, their ties to the famous men of the Rising affected how quickly their applications were processed. While they were not unaffected by the economic plight of all of Ireland during the 30s and 40s, the

[66] MSPC MSP34REF22047 (Mary Breen), Military Archives, Dublin.
[67] MSPC MSP34REF10854 (Elizabeth Corr), Military Archives, Dublin.
[68] MSPC MSP34REF10854 (Elizabeth Corr), Military Archives, Dublin.
[69] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 925.

women still held some public popularity.[70] Additionally, there had been special provisions made for any dependents of any signatories to the proclamation of 1916– widows, sisters, or children up to age 25– allotting £180, £52, or £80 per child respectively.[71] This furthered favoring some Rising participants and their dependents over others.

Another part of the difficulty in distance included the need to appear before the board. In their files, women from outside Dublin write about their worries and inability to appear before the board on such short notice. "I will not find it convenient to get to Dublin later on, being a good distance from Station and having a young baby," wrote Maria Quigley, suggesting dates during which the board could see her.[72] This was in 1935. In August 1936, she again urged the board to schedule her appearance before them to take place during the two weeks she would be in the city, during the month of September. There may have been a miscommunication, as the response was to inform her that no hearings would take place in August, but she was eventually heard in September of that same year. An extreme example of distance could be found in Gretta Williams, who had moved to the state of Maine in the United States sometime after the 1920s, and thus had to appoint her sister to appeal her case.[73]

The files also show some women found better success under the 1949 act. The Military Pensions Act of 1949 allowed for previous applicants to reapply and appeal their rejections under the 1924 and 1934 acts. Furthermore, it allowed any pensions forfeited

[70] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 927.
[71] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 927.
[72] MSPC MSP34REF4997 (Maria Clince), Military Archives, Dublin.
[73] MSPC MSP34REF30192 (Gretta Crosby), Military Archives, Dublin.

under the clauses of those acts to be restored and allowed new applications for veterans.[74] This was due, in part, to a more liberal system for processing and approving applications.[75] Those who reviewed these appeals, Timothy Forbes and Eugene Sheehy, also had a more liberal interpretation of active service.[76] Women like Kate Murphy and Christina Ward had their pension applications reviewed and were able to gain some pension for their service during Easter Week.[77] It should be noted both were from towns outside of Dublin County.

The women fought for what thought they were entitled to receive. Katie Daly, in her many written appeals to the assessors to expedite her application, disagreed with the assessors' decision to give her only a little over a year's service: "I have put in an appeal as I consider I am justly entitled to a full Easter Week service pension."[78] Some, like Christina Stafford, even wrote that she felt she was not "getting a fair deal," in regards to the pension she was awarded as it did not take into account a few years of her service.[79] This led to the reconsideration of her pension award, changing it from 4 and 369/500 years' service to 5 and 43/1000 years' service. Stafford, prior to her pension being awarded wrote to the board: "It is now eleven months since I was called [to give testimony]. I think I am entitled to ask what is the cause of this long delay."[80] She also makes mention, in another letter, of her disability claim being rejected, making her feel

[74] "Legislation," in "About the Collection," Military Service Pensions Collection (1916-1923), Óglaigh na hÉireann: Defence Forces Ireland, accessed December 9, 2018, http://www.militaryarchives.ie/collections/online-collections/military-service-pensions-collection-1916-1923/about-the-collection/legislation.
[75] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 925.
[76] Coleman, "Compensating Female Revolutionaries," 925.
[77] MSPC MSP34REF58418 (Kate Murphy) and MSP34REF24575 (Christina Ward).
[78] MSPC MSP34REF40382 (Katie Beatty), Military Archives, Dublin.
[79] MSPC MSP34REF8968 (Christina Brooks), Military Archives, Dublin.
[80] MSPC MSP34REF8968 (Christina Brooks), Military Archives, Dublin.

"a fake," as it was ruled her injuries while sustained in jail did not qualify.[81] Ellen Bushell was able to receive a pension despite not officially belonging to any of the organizations under the act. While she provided many services during the time of the Rising, and in the years after, it was her unique position as a woman with close ties to the nationalist groups that convinced the assessors to give her pension.[82] Some confusion remained, however, over how to classify her service when approving her application. In the end she was put down as a member of the IRA.[83] Again, it seems less to do with actual recognition of the service and more to do with financial need. In the case of Stafford, the pension was a way of easing physical injuries sustained while serving.

This lack of regard for women is best summed up by Gretta Crosby, in a letter to the board of assessors: "The old proverb 'Eaten bread is soon forgotten' seems fitting."[84] Whether it was defining the meaning of active service, distance, or lack of political connections, women struggled constantly to reaffirm their contributions in order to receive financial assistance. Not only that, but the board and its policies often had a system of favoritism in place, regarding location and politics, with gender playing a secondary role to those two. The Irish Free State government favored men because they posed the possibility of a threat to the newly established state, and the Irish Free State needed a way to pacify them. Furthermore, when assessing applications, the board favored those who had been in Dublin for the Rising over those who had not. Even after women finally received their pensions, it was often for negligible amounts. With some women facing poverty, this might be their only form of income whatsoever. Thus,

[81] MSPC MSP34REF8968 (Christina Brooks), Military Archives, Dublin.
[82] MSPC MSP34REF22326 (Ellen Sarah Bushell), Military Archives, Dublin.
[83] MSPC MSP34REF22326 (Ellen Sarah Bushell), Military Archives, Dublin.
[84] MSPC MSP34REF30192 (Gretta Crosby), Military Archives, Dublin.

applying for pensions did not give the women a heroic narrative; rather, it highlighted how the fickleness of politics could effectively silence these women's stories.

Chapter 4: The Memory Lives On

Helena Molony wrote of Séan Ó Faoláin's biography of Countess Markievicz:

> It is a curious thing that many men seem to be unable to believe that any woman can embrace an ideal – accept it intellectually, feel it as a profound emotion, and then calmly decide to make a vocation of working for its realisation. They give themselves endless pains to prove that every serious thing a woman does (outside nursing babies or washing pots) is the result of being in love with some man, or disappointment in love of some man, or looking for excitement, or limelight, or indulging their vanity. You do not seem to have escaped from the limitations of your sex, therefore you describe Maeve [Markievicz] as being 'caught up' by, or rallying 'to the side' of Connolly, Larkin, or some man or other, whereas the simple fact is that she was working, as a man might have worked, for the freedom of Ireland.[1]

Women played no small part in the Easter Rising. Whether it was through Cumann na mBan or another organization, their contributions aided the nationalist. Despite their efforts, however, their narrative was largely ignored in favor of the male martyrs and men of the movement. Was it because the women themselves thought their work unworthy of mention? Their statements and their application for pension prove otherwise. Or was it the need for a heroic narrative, one that reflected the narrative the Republic of Ireland wanted? Popular narratives prove that this may be one of many reasons.

Commemorations usually reflect collective memory. As defined by French philosopher Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory "is a current of continuous thought

[1] BMH W.S. no. 391 (Helena Molony).

whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive."[2] In the cases of historical events, the collective memory often takes precedence over the individual memory, in that an almost uniform narrative begins to emerge from the individual recollections.[3] Governments, commemorations, and similar activities all push for this unified form of memory, when the reality is often a bit more complicated.[4] Ireland, in particular, has attempted to push for a collective memory of the Rising, with mixed success.[5] Tensions often exist, not only between Northern Ireland and the Republic, but, at a time when veterans of the Rising were still alive, their memories conflicted with the official memory of the state. This results in an inherent discord between remembrance (or collective memory) and the individual memories of those who participated in the Easter Rebellion.

The 'Right' Memory

The narrative of women supporting the rebels did not seem to coincide with the historic narrative Ireland wanted to tell. In the immediate aftermath of its independence, the Irish Free State used the Rising to prove its legitimacy, albeit with their own spin on the story.[6] In subsequent years, Ireland has continued to use the Rising as a marker of national pride and identity, its commemorations attempting to recreate the feelings of previous demonstrations, of the revolutionary spirit.[7] Among these commemorations,

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[2] "Maurice Halbwachs," *The Collective Memory Reader*, 142-3.
[3] Guy Beiner, "Making sense of memory: coming to terms with conceptualisations of historical rememberances," *Remembering 1916*, ed. Richard S. Grayson & Fearghal McGarry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 17.
[4] For more on collective memory, see Maurice Halbwach's *The Collective Memory*.
[5] Beiner, "Making Sense of Memory," *Remembering 1916*, 17.
[6] Roisín Higgins, "'The Irish Republic was proclaimed by poster': the politics of commemorating the Easter Rising," *Remembering 1916*, 55.
[7] Higgins, "'The Irish Republic'," *Remembering 1916,* 51.

there is a political undercurrent, a need for a cohesive narrative that centered on the male martyrs who gave their lives for the cause. The Irish struggle for independence became masculine, heroic narrative that developed mythic proportions for the country. The male participants became immortalized and the boundary between myth and history blurred, as Beiner notes, further isolating the stories of women who supported the movements.[8] Commemorations became a particular source of contention for those who were involved with the Rising. Yet, in voicing their concern for the 'right' history to be told, women notably excluded themselves.

Kathleen Clarke, widow of Tom Clarke and privy to many of the plans for the Rising, took issue with the commemoration of the event in 1966, claiming she knew more about the events than anyone.[9] She was angered that her husband was relegated to a secondary role in commemorations. In her memory, Tom Clarke had been at the forefront of planning the rebellion and Patrick Pearse was the one with a lesser role to her husband.[10] She was not the only one. Nora Ashe, in her witness statement, claims, "Desmond Ryan [an Irish historian] in his recently published book has not been fair to Tomás. I say this not because I am Tomás's sister but in the interest of truth."[11] She qualifies her statement in the last sentence, perhaps because she is in disagreement with a historian (Ryan). Her claims asserted that her brother, Thomas (Tomás) took a much larger part in the Rising than Ryan claimed in his own book.

Madge Daly also worried about the reliability of other accounts of the Easter Rising, especially published histories. "When Le Roux [a writer] was writing his book he

[8] Beiner, "Making sense of memory," *Remembering 1916,* 16.
[9] Beiner, "Making sense of memory," *Remembering 1916*, 22.
[10] Beiner, "Making sense of memory," *Remembering 1916*, 22.
[11] BMH W.S. no. 645 (Nora Ashe), 3.

went to a lot of trouble interviewing persona associated with the Rising, so that his account of matters should be reliable," she remarks.[12] Still, she goes on, "My own memory is good as regards the events of that period and that is why I was anxious to write an account of them, especially when I saw the errors and inaccuracies, in some of the published accounts.[13] There is an underlying concern that the "right" history make it out to the public, rather than one that is sensationalized, or gives too much credit to certain actors in the rebellion than others. Yet the corrections focused on fully recognizing male rebels.

In commemorations, the purpose was to remind Ireland of the sacrifice of the past, invoking a debt, especially to those who had given their lives for the Easter Rising.[14] Prior to the Irish War of Independence, the remaining women of Cumann na mBan had collected funds and held dances to raise monies for the families of executed leaders.[15] They also played a leading role in elevating the men to martyr-like status, agreeing that women were not as important or significant as those men who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Madge Daly remembers that at the first-year anniversary of the Rising, in 1917:

> Crowds thronged the churches to attend the Requiem Masses for the 1916 martyrs arranged by the Cumann na mBan… Hours before daylight Saint John's Square was packed by a dense crowd of people, which swelled as others joined it from the farthest ends of the town; from streets and lanes and the suburbs they came to honour the memory of our latest martyrs.[16]

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[12] BMH W.S. no. 208 (Madge Daly), 4.
[13] BMH W.S. no. 208 (Madge Daly), 4.
[14] Dominic Bryan, "Ritual, identity and nation: when the historian becomes the high priest of commemoration," *Remembering 1916,* 33.
[15] Furlong, "'Herstory' Recovered," 80.
[16] BMH W.S. no. 855 (Madge Daly), 4.

One of Cumann na mBan's own used the term "martyrs" to categorize the likes of Patrick Pearse and Tom Clarke and ties their sacrifices back to Ireland's myth-history of struggle against the English. The pull toward the mythic heroes, especially in commemorations, continued pushing the stories of those executed to the fore. These young men had given their all for Ireland and their stories became a way of asking the present what it was willing to do for nation and the Irish people. Daly and other members of Cumann na mBan used the image of these heroes in order to push their nationalist agenda and turn popular opinion in their favor. Masses and the collection of funds for the heroes' dependents were held around the country to garner interest and spread positive ideas about nationalism and embracing an independent Ireland.[17]

Commemorations also became contests over who were the rightful heirs to the Easter Rising.[18] While Rising veterans were still alive, many found that the youth who claimed to be celebrating the rebellion in spirit with their forefathers were hardly deserving of that title.[19] In the din surrounding who deserved to be commemorated, for whom, and how, women's stories were further buried underneath the weight of the importance of the Rising. Women also tended to champion for their executed male relatives, or colleagues, which further led to their own stories being viewed as secondary.[20]

Immediate Memory

The British perception of these women may have also contributed to the underestimation of their roles. Following the surrender, Dublin watched "in horror,

[17] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 120.
[18] Higgins, "The Irish Republic," *Remembering 1916*, 58.
[19] Higgins, "The Irish Republic," *Remembering 1916*, 58.
[20] Higgins, "The Irish Republic," *Remembering 1916*, 59.

focusing particularly on the rebel aristocrat [Markievicz]."[21] While her gender largely influenced the commuting of her death sentence to a life of imprisonment, it was also used to undermine the Easter Rising as a whole, including the contributions of countless other women.[22] General Maxwell, sent by the British to enforce martial law in Dublin, saw their gender as a decisive factor in letting the female rebels go, calling them, "silly little girls," and only admonishing them for their behavior.[23] Most of the women detained were later released on the grounds that they had been misled into taking part in the Rising, or "had joined in out of a desire for 'excitement' or sense that it was 'something to be in' rather than a political conviction."[24] Women's political convictions were dismissed, considered nothing more than something these younger women had done for a bit of fun. With officials trivializing their work, there was no way women could push for their stories, to be heard. It benefitted them, however, when they had to take up the mantel for all those imprisoned. In 1918, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) grew worried enough to begin recording the women's movements.[25] Up until then, women were still seen as non-threatening in their activities. In the commemoration of the Easter Rising's anniversary in 1936, 157 of 1,665 people who signed the honor roll were women, yet their stories were not at the forefront of celebrations.[26] Subsequent events also tended to ignore or gloss over the contributions by women.[27]

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[21] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 75.
[22] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 75.
[23] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 51.
[24] McGarry, *The Rising,* 261.
[25] Furlong, "'Herstory' Recovered," 80.
[26] Coleman, "'There are thousands'," 490.
[27] Mary McAuliffe, Liz Gillis, Éadaoin Ní Chléirigh, Marja Almqvist, "Forgetting and Remembering – Uncovering Women's Histories at Richmond Barracks: A Public History Project," *Studies in Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2016), 27.

Markievicz, a prominent and outspoken feminist and known for her tendency to dress like a man, became was a prime target for criticism.[28] Helena Molony, close friend to the countess, was one of those who worried for Markievicz' reputation. "Madame Markievicz is in great danger of being misunderstood," she confides in her witness statement. "The only account written of her is by Séan Ó Faoláin– a very bad, inaccurate, misleading, and unsympathetic account of her… He wanted to make it a popular book, and wrote cattily of her life."[29] As a feminist and socialist, Markievicz represented the hopes of many for the equality of the sexes. The dismissal of her character had the same effect as General Maxwell's comments that the women's involvement was "silly": it proved demoralizing, and completely discounted the very real contributions made by these women. McGarry, in his research about the Easter Rising, found that most of the newspaper criticism the Volunteers and other groups faced was, "based on the perceived immorality of its violence."[30] The women who supported the Rising– Cumann na mBan or otherwise– were seen mostly as foolish rather than dangerous. The newspapers make no mention of the women, save for Countess Markievicz. Once again, the women's side of the story was omitted where it did not serve a narrative.

Dubliners changed their opinion following the executions of the rebellion's top officials when sympathy began to swing their way. Now, the wives and sisters of these men were painted as tragic figures, surrounded by an "aura of romance."[31] This view was mostly accorded to those women attached to the important men, or rather, those who had been executed as leaders of the rebellion. The widows of these men were accorded status

[28] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 75.
[29] BMH W.S. no. 391 (Helena Molony), 53.
[30] McGarry, *The Rising*, 178.
[31] Hill, *Women in Ireland*, 76.

as a symbol for what Ireland had lost.[32] Their image was helped by the masses held in honor of those executed, making them public figures within Dublin.[33] The tragic was further romanticized with the marriage of Grace Gifford to Joseph Plunkett. Gifford and Plunkett had planned to wed Easter Sunday, but the rebellion put their plans on hold as Joseph Plunkett went to fight. Hours before his execution, Gifford was allowed to marry Plunkett and visit him in jail.[34] Previously considered a "pathetic marriage," it was later considered so tragic that these events are now commemorated in a popular song.[35] This left other women out of the narrative, as the focus became the tragedy, women taking on the roles of widows rather than participants.

Histories and 'Herstories'

For male politicians in the early years of Ireland's independence, "having played a role in the Easter Rising was an important badge of honour."[36] This led to many claiming, or attempting to claim, Easter Rising service, regardless of the truth of the fact. By 1924, the numbers of people who had claimed to participate in it, especially in the GPO, became "the butt of jokes."[37] The commemoration of 1916 eventually became enmeshed with the memory of 'the Troubles,' the period from the late 1960s to the late 1990s, known for its violence.[38] In this time period, the Easter Rising came to signify the great divide between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, offering little commemorative space for women.

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[32] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 62.
[33] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women,* 62.
[34] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 63-4.
[35] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, 64.
[36] Coleman, "'There are thousands'," 488.
[37] Coleman, "'There are thousands'," 488.
[38] William Blair, "Myth, memory and material culture: remembering 1916 at the Ulster Museum," *Remembering 1916*, 181.

Only when the Military Pensions act of 1934 included Cumann na mBan were women first given the chance to officially talk about their experiences. No longer was the pension relegated to veterans of the Rising (and subsequent conflicts); women found they could be recognized as well. They could remember their involvement in the movement, recorded in a statement, and thus their memories of their own contributions came to the fore. There were also two women, Margaret Skinnider and Kathleen Clarke, who wrote memoirs regarding the event. Margaret Skinnider's memoir, originally published in 1917, fell out of print until it was revived as part of the centennial commemorations.[39] Kathleen Clarke's memoir and biography were published in 1991, after her grand-niece edited and compiled her grand-aunt's writings.[40] Largely though, women were continuously excluded from post-Rising celebrations commemorating the event.[41]

The women themselves talked about their service somewhat sparingly in the statements they gave to the pensions committee. This was in part due to the nature of the committee, which often expected responses in a court-room style interview, leaving little room for elaboration. In addition, many women still felt a loyalty to the organization and the need to keep the organization's duties a secret.[42] Elizabeth Cooney, one of these women, succinctly states her job as, "We… looked after the men generally. We helped to look after the wounded."[43] Peig Conlon was sent to tend to the wounded in a makeshift hospital, where she remained Wednesday until Saturday. When asked if it was to do First Aid, she replied yes and, "I stayed in the hall until all the patients were taken to

[39] Tom Peterkin, "Memoirs of Scots sniper during Easter Rising to be published," *The Scotsman,* December 29, 2016, https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/memoirs-of-scots-sniper-during-easter-rising-to-be-published-1-4327434.
[40] Clarke, Kathleen (2008), *Kathleen Clarke: Revolutionary Woman*. Dublin, O'Brien Press.
[41] McAuliffe, et al., "Forgetting and Remembering," 27.
[42] Furlong, "'Herstory' Recovered," 71.
[43] MSPC MSP34REF13558 (Elizabeth Cooney), Military Archives, Dublin.

Richmond Hospital."[44] A quick description with little detail. The brevity of the statements leaves little room for any discussion of their feelings of patriotism, the importance of them, or the way the women viewed their own contributions. Women who participated as couriers rarely knew what was in the messages, choosing to not know so that, if captured, they could feign innocent. Their sense of loyalty, too, also kept them from wanting to divulge their information, even not in the presence of immediate danger. Thus, the almost staccato delivery of their testimonies during their interviews reflected the unwillingness to breach that sense of loyalty and trust given to them years ago. Sinéad McCoole, in her own research regarding Cumann na mBan, discovered she had two great-aunts in the movement, but their stories had never been told in the popular recollections of the family.[45]

A 1926 article in *An t-Oglach* (the newspaper that followed the *Irish Volunteer*), by Miss M. Reynolds, a participant of the Rising, included an Editor's Note that read: "It is right that the heroic women and girls who gave such splendid service to the Irish Cause… should have their story told by one of themselves, but the difficulty has been to persuade any of them to incur the publicity essential to the verisimilitude of the narrative."[46] Why such reticence to share? The commentary seems to suggest that the women's loyalty to the organization meant keeping the secrets of Cumann na mBan close. Thus, the woman had fully internalized the supportive role of Cumann na mBan. The editor's note goes on to state, "Despite her objection, we think it imperative that her

[44] MSPC MSP34REF21093 (Peig Conlon), Military Archives, Dublin.
[45] McCoole, *No Ordinary Women*, Intro.
[46] "Cumann na mBan in the G.P.O: Heroic Work of the Irish Girls During the Fighting of Easter Week, 1916," *An t-Oglach*, (March 27, 1926), 3.

name should be published."[47] Again, there is a certain hesitation in sharing, or in this case, attaching a name to the account. While it may never be known why Molly Reynolds did not want her name attached to the article, she later gave testimony in a witness statement, collected in the 1940s and 50s. In it, she described the day-to-day duties of a Cumann na mBan member and her involvement in the Rising.

In elevating the men of their lives and forgoing their own narratives, women had already begun erasing their own stories out of popular history. With the new opportunity to share their stories, however, they also chose to say little of their own contributions, instead keeping the secrets entrusted to them during their time in Cumann na mBan or the Citizen Army. This trend would continue throughout the testimonies and witness statements as their stories were recorded.

Framing the Narrative

As they aged, some women developed anxiety about being forgotten. Helena Molony recalls, "Fox got a lot of his information from me, when he wrote his book, 'The Irish Citizen Army.'"[48] While not a participant in the Rising, Elizabeth Bloxham was sympathetic to the movement, as part of Cumann na mBan. "I now write these details because I have been asked to do so in the interest of those who, in time to come, may wish to have sidelights on the great event which made a vital change in the history of our country," she says in her testimony.[49] As the Rising faded from memory and into myth,

[47] "Cumann na mBan in the G.P.O: Heroic Work of the Irish Girls During the Fighting of Easter Week, 1916," *An t-Oglach*, (March 27, 1926), 3.
[48] BMH W.S. no. 391 (Helena Molony), 52.
[49] BMH W.S. no. 632 (Elizbeth Bloxham), 26.

the need for these stories became important. There was a simultaneous pull, however, to be remembered and reluctance to share their stories.[50]

Helena Molony, one of those who provided a witness statement, confides that her partner, Evelyn O'Brien, had quipped, "It is Miss Kissane who ought to get a special medal as decoration for dragging information out of a lot of unwilling clams like you all. I doubt if any of you were out in the rebellion at all.'"[51] This is another example of that reticence women had to share their stories, even in cases where it might benefit them.

There were, however, some statements in which the women only spoke about the men in their lives, such as Nora Ashe, whose witness statement on her own actions was meant as a "biographical note" on her brother, Thomas Ashe, a founding member of the Volunteers.[52] Geraldine Dillon, sister to Joseph Plunkett, was asked, in addition to events and opinions regarding "events of national importance," to give a biography of her brother; it spans almost her entire witness statement, with Dillon discussing the events in relation to her brother, rather than herself.[53] She discusses her own involvement, but not at length as she had about her brother. Even Áine Ceannt, who was interviewed about her service, was also asked to speak on behalf of her husband, Eamonn.[54] The interest in their male relatives' martyrdom over-shadowed and sometimes silenced their own narratives.

The tendency to extract more personal details of the men's lives helps biographers and reporters to further romanticize the male narrative. An example of this can be found in a contemporary article, titled "Voices of 1916: 'Con was in love with Lucy - and would

[50] McGarry, "Hard service: remembering the Abbey Theatre's rebels," *Remembering 1916,* 97.
[51] Quoted in McGarry, "Hard service," *Remembering 1916*, 97.
[52] BMH W.S. no. 645 (Nora Ashe).
[53] BMH W.S. no. 358 (Geraldine Dillon).
[54] BMH W.S. no. 264 (Áine Ceannt).

have married her if he had lived'." Written as part of the centennial commemoration, the article uses Elizabeth Colbert's testimony to investigate the tragic life of Con Colbert, her brother, who was one of the men executed. The article calls it a "poignant insight into a future cut short by his execution," then quotes excerpts from Elizabeth's testimony, including the equally "tragic" episode regarding a pack of letters from Con that never made it to his sweetheart, Lucy.[55] It takes further testimony from Annie O'Brien (née Cooney), regarding Con. While Elizabeth Colbert's statement also discusses her own involvement in the movement, it is of little interest to this author. The article itself uses her testimony regarding her relationship to Con, namely that they were friends, but Annie "thought an awful lot of him and, of course, he must have known it."[56] The women in the narrative, Con's sister Elizabeth and his friend Annie, are relegated to a secondary, supportive role. They are only used as vessels to tell the heroic, but tragic, narrative of Con.

Yet, Annie helped craft this narrative in the first place. Annie, who gave a joint statement with Lily Curran, another member, frames her entire narrative around Con and the men she helped as part of Cumann na mBan. "Christy Byrne [a member of the Volunteers] was in the car and we helped him to bring the stuff into the house," reads one sentence. "Lily, when she came back, and myself were feverishly busy filling Christy Byrne's and Con Colbert's haversacks and our own with any food we could find," reads another.[57] Her entire witness statement is mostly framed around the men she interacted

[55] Susan Daly, "Voices of 1916: 'Con was in love with Lucy - and would have married her if he had lived'," *The Journal* (Mar 27, 2016). https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/con-colbert-sister-elizabeth-voices-1916-2678362-Mar2016/.
[56] BMH W.S. no. 805 (Annie O'Brien), 2.
[57] BMH W.S. no. 805 (Annie O'Brien), 2, 5.

with, especially those of both national and personal importance. In thinking "an awful lot of [Con]," and perhaps the other men too, Annie relegated her own narrative to the background, as a support. Her feelings of reverence toward these men led her to make her story secondary.

Anna Fahy's testimony is similar in that she relates her own actions to those of the men, including her husband, Frank. She takes her time to describe the men and their visits, in particular Sean McDermott, saying, "Sean was always joking. I never saw him in a bad humour; he was the most lovable character of the lot."[58] Her statement veers away from the men when she is either on her own or with other women, then quickly resumes a secondary role as soon as she discusses how the men were involved in the events of the Easter Rising.

The Memory Now

Some efforts have been made to rectify the lapse in memory. In 2016, the Irish government allocated €22 million to fund several restoration and conservation projects.[59] One of those were the remnants of the Richmond Barracks, where seventy-seven women were imprisoned following the Easter Rising. "It was intended that the work on the Richmond Project would contribute by broadening the histories of the revolutionary period and return these women to their rightful place in Irish history," writes McAuliffe.[60] Further adding to this commemoration was a "commemorative quilt," purposely made as commentary on women's roles traditionally framed as useful for

[58] BMH W.S. no. 202 (Anna Fahy), 1.
[59] McAuliffe, et al., "Forgetting and Remembering," 18.
[60] McAuliffe, et al., "Forgetting and Remembering," 20.

housework rather than political activism, especially following the Rising.[61] While these efforts are important, they are still severely lacking.

Of course, as these women's stories come to light, there also runs the risk of politicizing their histories. Hard questions about the history are often avoided, in Ireland, in preference for "easily digestible" history.[62] There is a certain theatricality to the Easter Rising, as if the leaders had planned their own execution to act as a poetic motif in future commemorations.[63] Women's stories are no exception. Their contributions were important, but should not become romanticized, made to be a heroic tale of sacrifice. This trap could just as easily fall into the same one as the histories of the men; easy to digest, no hard questions asked. The tension between history and commemoration is a difficult one to manage, but it can be done.

Despite these potential pitfalls, the omission of these women's narratives still mars Ireland's memory of the Easter Rising. Whether it was through slander, or a decision to focus on the male martyrdom associated with the Rising, official commemorations and the popular memory have been reticent to remembering the women of the rebellion. Not every woman was a Markievicz, but their contributions are still necessary to fully grasp a picture of the Rising as it happened, even in cases where it might upset the myth-history of Ireland. If anything, this makes it all the more important to include these histories, so as to begin to deconstruct the 'easily digestible' history that has been a part of Ireland's memory for so long.

[61] McAuliffe, et al., "Forgetting and Remembering," 26.
[62] David Fitzpatrick, "Instant history: 1912, 1916, 1918," *Remembering 1916*, 65.
[63] Fitzpatrick, "Instant history," *Remembering 1916,* 68.

Conclusion

The history of those women involved in the Easter Rising is a complicated one. At each point in their narratives, their positions were subordinated to those of their male compatriots, reinforcing a gender binary between them. From the beginning, the women of Cumann na mBan performed work more suitable for a housewife, hardly portraying the image of a gun-wielding revolutionary. Even the women who joined the Citizen Army, which was less strict about women's roles, were relegated to doing traditionally feminine work, on top of their less-feminine jobs. Once the Rising was underway, women continued to perform the tasks they had trained for– nursing, gun-running, couriering– with the addition of more housewife-like work: cooking. Though there were a few instances in which women pushed back against the subordinate position they held, these moments were few and far between, and more the exception than the rule.

In the aftermath of the Rising, the women continued to stay within the confines of their gendered roles. They worked together to raise funds for dependents of the Volunteers, including fellow wives and their children, and pushed the martyr narrative for the executed Volunteer leaders. Even when the Irish Free State sought to collect witness testimonies about the Rising, women chose to elevate their male relatives over themselves, in order to preserve the 'right' history. They also remained loyal in their commitment to never share the secrets of their organizations, especially in Cumann na mBan, choosing silence over telling their own histories.

When the pension acts were enacted, women applied but faced hardships relating to both their gender and political affiliations. As many were die-hard nationalists, the government chose to overlook them in its initial efforts to compensate people for their

service in the Rising and subsequent conflicts. Furthermore, the men in government did not consider the women's efforts worth compensating, except where they were dependents of men who had served to create the Irish Free State. Once Cumann na mBan was included in the list of organizations eligible for pension, women still had to prove their service, made difficult through issues of attending their hearings and corroborating their stories. Also, unlike their male peers, pensions were not a form of recognition, but a form of salvation from the economic hardship that befell Ireland in the late 1920s and 30s.

In exploring the narratives of these women, the hope is that the narrative surrounding them becomes more nuanced. With the release of documents by the Military Archives in Dublin, historians have revealed that women took a much more active part in the conflict than previously thought. The pension files also reveal the hardships faced in the years following, the continuation of traditional gender binaries, and the ways in which politics affected the women's daily lives. Though some historians may argue their exclusion from the original pension acts was based on their gender, the situation is far more nuanced. In Ireland, politics and gender often collided, overlapping to the create the circumstances that led to women's involvement since the beginning.

Other historians may also argue that women pushed for their own agendas while furthering the nationalist cause, but to do so would be misguided. Certainly, some women within the nationalist movements wished to advance the rights of women in conjunction with Irish independence. What the evidence has revealed, however, is that women tended to stay within their limited gender roles, forgoing women's rights. Not every woman who

contributed her efforts to the Rising can fit the heroine narrative pushed forward by some scholars.

It is important to consider this fact when writing about women's histories in conflicts. Historians may find it tempting to elevate women's histories to a mythic status as has been done to many male-focused historical narratives. This would be a mistake, however. Romanticizing women's work as a constant struggle against patriarchal norms establishes a form of myth-history that can be just as misleading as the myth-histories of men. As Furlong notes, "It is quite easy, with the luxury of hindsight and ninety years of female emancipation, to say that these women do deserve… credit."[426] When investigating women's contributions to historical events, historians cannot forget that not all women set to break gender norms of that time period. Often, women operated within those boundaries to the best of their ability to fulfill their duties. That does not mean, however, completely eradicating the fact that women performed their jobs within the constraints of traditional femininity.

Not all women's histories can be uplifting. Sometimes, as in the case of the Rising women, their contributions were relegated to the background as they sought to memorialize the events of the Rising. Sometimes, too, instances where they could gain recognition they do not, as with the pensions. To present a more nuanced version of history, women's narratives that conform to gender roles of the time must also be included. These women still contributed to the cause, even if they did not push forward a feminist agenda. Furthermore, it would also be a mistake to ignore that even the women themselves seemed to have no desire to have their accomplishments elevated to such a

[426] Furlong, "'Herstory' Recovered," 90.

mythic status. Their focus was on legitimizing the Rising in the eyes of the Irish public. The level of secrecy surrounding their work and their sense of duty made them reticent to share their stories.

In military histories, especially, historians should not forget that women often operate within the gender binary, and that it can be willingly. Militarized femininity is an important aspect of that. It is not always imposed or manipulated onto the women who support the military cause. Scholars like Cynthia Enloe have done extensive work on the effects that militarization has on women, how it can manipulate femininity. Her studies, though focused on modern militaries could also benefit scholars as they investigate how Ireland has utilized its women to further its agendas in the past. Her arguments, however, should also be considered carefully, as her argument does not apply to all conflicts. The rebel women of the Easter Rising push against the narrative that militarized femininity is forced upon them. In their case, they adopted the militarized femininity offered to them as a means of expressing their patriotism and dedication to the independence of Ireland.

As the Military Archives digitize more documents, the hope is that more light can be shed on the Rising and women's place in it. Those documents that have been released already provide ample material to study. While scholars have begun piecing together women's history in the Rising, Irish War of Independence, and the Irish Civil War, they have only begun to scratch the surface.

There are also opportunities to explore the myths Ireland has created surrounding its founding as a country independent of the British, how memories have changed and why one narrative has superseded the rest. Much weight, especially, has been placed on

the Rising.[427] With the Rising viewed as a 'break' in history, it becomes even more imperative that women's histories are included. Besides acknowledging the efforts women put into establishing an independent Ireland, this thesis suggests some reasons why their stories were left behind in the making of Ireland's founding history.

This thesis has shown that women willingly took on a supportive role in their work for the Irish Volunteers and the Easter Rising. This is in direct contrast to popular narratives surrounding rebel women who flouted societally-acceptable forms of femininity, acting as a heroine in the Rising narrative. The women of the Rising worked with militarized femininity to allow themselves an outlet for their patriotism. Yet, their contributions have been forgotten in favor of more heroic narratives, especially the narratives of the male martyrs. This was not necessarily due to the pressure to conform to societal standards of femininity; in many cases, the women themselves chose to elevate their male relatives' narratives over their own. This research has added nuance to the discussion of Irish women's contributions to Ireland's national history, especially in countering the heroic narrative made popular in the country's collective memory. The rebel women's narratives are not one of heroism, but of duty to their nationalist cause. It is time to acknowledge that women's work undertaken, even in a supportive and societally-acceptable feminine way, is no less important than work undertaken outside of Irish notions of femininity.

[427] Higgins, "The politics of commemorating," in *Remembering 1916*, 60.

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